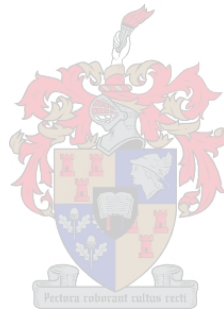


ADULT ADOPTEES' PERSPECTIVES ON ADOPTION

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Thesis presented in fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts
(Psychology) at the University of Stellenbosch



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Declaration

By submitting this thesis electronically, I declare that the entirety of the work contained therein is my own, original work, that I am the sole author thereof (save to the extent explicitly otherwise stated), that reproduction and publication thereof by Stellenbosch University will not infringe any third party rights and that I have not previously in its entirety or in part submitted it for obtaining any qualification.

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Acknowledgements

I want to begin by expressing my gratitude to God for always giving me the strength to continue on the journey of fulfilling my dreams. I would also like to acknowledge all the people who have encouraged and loved me in this process.

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As a personal ending to my acknowledgements I want to unofficially name my research, as initially suggested by my Father when I began this academic journey.

Therefore, Dad the thesis according to us is called:

“THE WORLD THROUGH THE HEARTS OF ADOPTEES”

Abstract

In this study I explore the perspectives on adoption of searching adult adoptees who are living in the Western Cape province of South Africa. The motivation for this study was validated when a review of the South African literature indicated that most of the adoption research had been conducted with non-adoptees or adopted children, whereas this research focused solely on the perspectives of adult adoptees. The research aim was achieved by answering the following research question: What are adult adoptees' perspectives on adoption?

The theoretical framework for this study is Erikson's Psychosocial Theory, as well as Family Systems Theory. An exploratory qualitative research design was utilised due to its relevance to obtaining subjective adoption perspectives. Additionally, I applied specific procedures to ensure trustworthy research results. The adoptees were identified and recruited by Cape Town Child Welfare and through snowball sampling. A biographical questionnaire was utilised to add context to their responses. Semi-structured interviews with open-ended questions, followed by probing questions when necessary, were used to collect data from 12 adoptees. Thematic analysis was implemented to analyse the data obtained, and the ATLAS.ti 7 (2015) software program was utilised as an organisational tool.

The perspectives of the adult adoptees were identified and described within the following four meta-themes: 1) Optimistic adoption views, beliefs and values, 2) The integral role of the adoptive family in adoption, 3) The impact of adoption, and 4) Perceptions of adoption in society. These meta-themes individually include themes and subthemes. The findings indicate that adoption is a good option for alternative childcare and considered by most of the participants as a normal life experience. All of the adult adoptees believed in the positive nature of adoption and the possibility of positive adoption outcomes. However, a positive adoption experience is dependent on the adoptees' access to their biological history, the absence of abuse, and open communicativeness on adoption within the adoptive family. The greatest adoption-related recommendation uncovered through this research is that adoptive parents, the extended family and society need to be educated appropriately to prepare them to understand adoption and their roles within adoption better.

Keywords: Adoptees, Adoption, Adoption disclosure, Communicative openness, Entrance narratives, Kinship care, Searching adoptees

Opsomming

In hierdie studie ondersoek ek die perspektief van aanneming van volwasse aangenome persone wat in die Wes-Kaap provinsie van Suid-Afrika woon. Die motivering vir hierdie studie is gestaaf toe 'n oorsig van die Suid-Afrikaanse literatuur aangedui het dat die meerderheid navorsing oor aanneming met mense onderneem is wat nie aangeneem is nie of met aangenome kinders, terwyl hierdie navorsing suiwer gefokus het op die perspektiewe van volwasse aangenome persone. Die navorsingsdoel is bereik deur die volgende navorsingsvraag te beantwoord: Wat is die perspektief van aanneming van volwasse aangenome persone?

Die teoretiese raamwerk vir hierdie studie was Erikson se Psigososiale Teorie, asook *Family Systems Theory*. 'n Verkennende kwalitatiewe navorsingsontwerp is gebruik vanweë die gepastheid daarvan om subjektiewe perspektiewe van aanneming te verkry. Ek het ook spesifieke prosedures toegepas om betroubare navorsingsresultate te verseker. Die aangenome persone is deur die Kaapstadse Kindersorg geïdentifiseer en gewerf, asook deur sneeubalsteekproefneming (*snowball sampling*). Daar is van 'n biografiese vraelys gebruik gemaak om konteks aan hulle antwoorde te verskaf. Semi-gestruktureerde onderhoude met oopeinde-vrae, gevolg deur ondersoekende vrae waar nodig, is gebruik om data vanaf 12 aangenome persone te versamel. Tematiese ontleding is gebruik om die data wat verkry is, te ontleed, en die ATLAS.ti 7 (2015) sagteware program is as 'n organisatoriese instrument gebruik.

Die perspektiewe van die volwasse aangenome persone is geïdentifiseer en binne die volgende vier meta-temas beskryf: 1) Optimistiese sienings, oortuigings en waardes, 2) Die integrale rol van die aangenome gesin in aanneming, 3) Die impak van aanneming en 4) Persepsies van aanneming in die samelewing. Hierdie meta-temas het elkeen bestaan uit temas en sub-temas. Die bevindings dui aan dat aanneming 'n goeie opsie is vir alternatiewe kindersorg en deur die meerderheid van die deelnemers as 'n normale lewenservaring beskou is. Al die volwasse aangenome persone het geglo in die positiewe aard van aanneming en die moontlikheid vir positiewe uitkomstes van aanneming. 'n Positiewe ervaring van aanneming was egter afhanklik van die aangenome persone se toegang tot hulle biologiese geskiedenis, die afwesigheid van mishandeling, en oop kommunikasie oor aanneming binne die aannemende gesin. Die grootste aannemingsverwante aanbeveling wat deur hierdie navorsing gevind is, is dat aanneemouers, die uitgebreide familie en die samelewing korrek opgevoed moet word om hulle voor te berei om aanneming en hulle rolle daarbinne beter te begryp.

Sleutelwoorde: Aangenome persone, Aanneming, Onthulling van aanneming, Kommunikatiewe oopheid, Intree-narratiewe, Familiesorg, Soekende aangenome persone

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Chapter 1

Introduction to, Motivation for and Aims of this Study

1.1 Introduction

Adoption is the legal process of placing a child with inadequate or non-existent parental care into a permanent family environment (Mokomane, Rochat, & The Directorate, 2012). Moreover, adoption has been practised globally throughout all historical eras (Palacios & Brodzinsky, 2010). This global practice is supported by the United Nations, which provided guidelines for the alternative care of children (United Nations, 2009). The United Nations advocates that children should be raised in a nurturing and permanent family environment to promote their development, including the use of alternative childcare practices such as adoption (United Nations, 2009).

In Africa, kinship care (the informal care of children by biological relatives) is the preferred choice of childcare when parental care is absent (Barnett & Whiteside, 2006). More specifically, in South Africa, orphaned children are placed in the legal foster care of relatives (Gerrand & Nathane-Taulela, 2015). However, according to Haeri Mazanderani et al. (2014), there were an estimated one and a half to two million adoptable orphans in South Africa in 2010, and the National Department of Social Development adoption registry indicated that a total of 10 019 children were adopted from 2010 until 2016 (I. Chavalala, personal communication, May 27, 2016). This is a very low adoption rate compared to the number of adoptable children.

Therefore, irrespective of preferred kinship and foster care alternatives practised in South Africa, the previous research has highlighted the large number of adoptable children in need of permanent family placement. For this reason, research has been conducted to develop a culturally relevant adoption model for South Africa in order to promote legal adoption by biological relatives and non-biological prospective parents by combining traditional views with the alternative childcare policy (Gerrand & Nathane-Taulela, 2015).

Due to limited data available on adoption in South Africa, a large study on adoption was commissioned by the Directorate of Adoptions and the International Social Services based in the South African Department of Social Development (Mokomane et al., 2012). The idea of conducting South African adoption research was to encourage the placement of orphaned

children in a legally secure family environment (Mokomane et al., 2012). Three recent studies conducted in South Africa confirmed that more research on the topic of adoption is necessary (Blackie, 2014; Mokomane et al., 2012; Rochat, Mokomane, Mitchell, & The Directorate, 2015), but none of these studies were specific regarding which aspect of adoption is vital for future research.

The South African study conducted by Rochat et al. (2015) focused on public perceptions, beliefs and experiences of fostering and adoption. However, the Rochat et al. (2015) study did not include participants who were adopted, or participants who were in foster care. Consequently, the research lacked the perspectives of those who were adopted and who were placed in foster care, thereby not having a full representation of all those involved in adoption or foster care. Palacios and Brodzinsky (2010) state that most adoption research is conducted with adopted children and adolescents. Furthermore, it was evident during a review of the adoption literature that there is a lack of adult adoptee research in South Africa. Therefore, the focus of the current study is on adult adoptees' (adults who were adopted as children) perspectives on adoption.

The lack of adult adoptee perspectives in South African adoption research suggests that a specific research focus on the adult adoptee may provide a different perspective on the phenomenon of adoption. Consequently, this study's research question is: What are adult adoptees' perspectives on adoption? The word perspective is defined as "[a] particular way of thinking about something, especially when influenced by personal experience or circumstances" (Macmillan, 1996, p. 716). I selected the word perspective due to it being inclusive of the terms perceptions, beliefs and experiences, as used in another South African study (Rochat et al., 2015). Therefore, the primary contribution of the current study is the identification of themes relating to adoption, based on the perspectives of adult South African adoptees in the Western Cape province. This was achieved by asking the following primary interview question: "What are your perspectives on adoption?"

The lack of South African adoption research and adult adoptees' perspectives in adoption research contributed to the conceptualisation of this study, the research topic, the research question, the motivation for the research and research aims. Therefore, this chapter will commence by discussing the motivation for this research, followed by the research aim and objectives.

1.2 Motivation for this research

South Africa's adoption policy seeks to promote adoption as the optimal option for the care of children without sustainable parental or familial care (Mokomane et al., 2012). This policy was based on knowledge deriving from research that adoption provides a more secure environment than foster or residential care (Mokomane et al., 2012). Furthermore, it is stated by Mokomane et al. (2012) that the Children's Act (No. 38 of 2005) was considered to meet international standards for adoption infrastructure. Therefore, the concerns raised relate to reports such as national online news stories (Diale & Pakade, 2014) stating that the adoption rate in South Africa has decreased by 50% in the past 10 years, while child abandonment has increased and the HIV pandemic has left many children orphaned. Blackie (2014) has suggested that the decrease in adoption is caused by restrictive and multilevel procedural legislature that limits the implementation of the Act, an aspect that is termed the constructive prevention of adoption. Blackie (2014) also identified poverty, mass urbanisation, violence, gender inequality and diminished family support as the challenges leading to an increase in child abandonment.

Furthermore, according to Mokomane et al. (2012, p. 356):

Current evidence from the USA also suggests that adoption is unlikely to become a popular pathway to family without specific and targeted information and awareness campaigns, and it is imperative that greater investment be made in developing data systems that can provide evidence to drive such activities within South Africa.

Therefore, the Directorate of Adoptions and the International Social Services decided to promote the study of adoption in South Africa in an attempt to increase the adoption rate (Mokomane et al., 2012). This indicates that adoption is accepted as a necessary practice in South Africa and that research on adoption is essential, although recent research has refrained from asking adoptees about their views on adoption.

The lack of an adoptee perspective is evident in research by Rochat et al. (2015), who reported on public perceptions, beliefs and experiences of fostering and adoption in South Africa. The Rochat et al. (2015) study made use of six homogenous focus groups to increase knowledge and data on fostering and adoption. A gap that I identified in their research was that adult adoptees were not included in their study – non-adopted adults were asked for their opinion on adoption, instead of adoptees themselves. The exclusion of adoptees raises an important

concern, because adult adoptees are in the same developmental phase as the participants in the Rochat et al. (2015) research sample. The question arises whether adult adoptees' perspectives on adoption are considered as valuable within South African adoption research.

According to Hook and Duncan (2009), it seems controversial for adults to reflect their view based on what they experienced in childhood, because an adult's view may completely differ from how s(he) viewed life as a child. The implication is that the adult perspective is considered irrelevant, because adults are only capable of projecting their current views onto a childhood phenomenon (Hook & Duncan, 2009) such as adoption. However, Hook and Duncan (2009) also acknowledge that both adult and child participants should be included in psychology research. Therefore, based on the lack of adult adoptee research in South Africa, the primary motivation for the current study was to give a voice to adult adoptees, because the views of adoptees are relevant as they are the recipients and focus of the adoption process.

This study provided a platform for adoptees to reveal what they think are important themes relating to adoption. In addition, during the interviews the participants in this study were not directed towards discussing the significant themes identified in the adoption literature. A secondary motivation for this study was to increase the information available on adoption in South Africa. Consequently, this study aimed to explore the adoption perspectives of adults who are living in the Western Cape province of South Africa and who were adopted as children.

1.3 Research Aims and Objectives

This study aimed to explore the perspectives on adoption of adults who were adopted as children in South Africa by answering the following research question: What are adult adoptees' perspectives on adoption?

Consequently, the objectives of this study were:

- To explore the views on adoption of adult adoptees in the Western Cape province
- To identify and describe various themes relating to adoption
- To accumulate knowledge of South African adult adoptees' perspectives on adoption

1.4 Chapter Conclusion

Adoption is a legal childcare alternative to providing children in need with a permanent family environment. In South Africa, kinship care, in which orphaned children are placed in the legal

foster care of relatives, is preferred (Gerrand & Nathane-Taulela, 2015). However, the HIV pandemic and the increase in abandoned children in South Africa has created a greater need for secure family environments for orphaned children (Diale & Pakade, 2014). The demand for permanent family placement is perpetuated by the decrease in the adoption rate. It has been reported that, although the South African adoption legislature is of an international standard, there are visible challenges that affect the implementation of adoption policies (Blackie, 2014). Therefore, in an attempt to address the low adoption rate in South Africa, research has now begun to focus on cultural factors that influence adoption practice (Gerrand & Nathane-Taulela, 2015).

In the introduction to this chapter I motivated the need for adoption research in South Africa because of one identified gap in the research – a lack of the adult adoptees’ perspectives. The lack of South African adoption research and adult adoptees’ perspectives on adoption are the underlying motivations for the current research. Therefore, the aim of this research was to explore the perspectives on adoption of adult adoptees who live in the Western Cape province of South Africa.

1.5 Thesis Outline

This thesis contains six chapters, including the introduction (Chapter 1), which is followed by the other chapters as described below.

1.5.1 Chapter 2

In this chapter, the South African literature that focuses mainly on adoption is discussed to provide the context for this research. Various perspectives on adoption outside of South Africa are also reported, and research based on adult adoptees as the participants is highlighted.

1.5.2 Chapter 3

This chapter describes in detail the theoretical framework that supports this research. The research is based on two conceptual frameworks. The first is Family Systems Theory, which provides a systems understanding of the relational interaction within a family. The second is Psychosocial Theory, which provides a developmental approach and explains the individual growth of the adoptee. These theories are discussed to conceptualise the themes relevant to adult adoptees.

1.5.3 Chapter 4

This chapter provides the details of the research methodology applied in this study. It consists of a description of the research design and the research method. The research method includes a discussion of the participant criteria, sampling strategy, measures, data collection and data analysis. It is followed by a delineation of the procedures involved to ensure trustworthy research and the ethical procedure adhered to in this study.

1.5.4 Chapter 5

This chapter reports on the themes identified in the transcribed research interviews, which were analysed and coded as discussed in Chapter 4. The results of the research are reported and discussed through the elaboration of meta-themes. Four meta-themes were identified, each consisting of themes and sometimes subthemes. In addition, similarities and differences between the participants' responses are highlighted in the discussion.

1.5.5 Chapter 6

This is the final thesis chapter, which contains the conclusion on the research conducted as well as a final evaluation of the major aspects discussed in the thesis. This chapter also includes the research limitations and recommendations for future research.

Chapter 2

Literature Review

2.1 Introduction

In this literature review, I continue to discuss the South African context of adoption and adoption literature. It is important to note that, when discussing the South African context and literature, terms are used to classify different racial groups. Due to the limited research literature on adoption in South Africa, the initial discussion is followed by a discussion of various international perspectives on adoption, after which other research themes are discussed that have incorporated adult adoptees as participants. Although the research discussed was conducted mostly outside of South Africa, the countries of origin of most of the research literature have similar diversity dimensions as found in South Africa (Mokomane et al., 2012).

The first section provides a background to adoption in South Africa to provide the context of the current research, which leads to highlighting the purpose of conducting adoption research in South Africa. This section continues with a discussion on orphanhood, child-headed households and child abandonment. The next section includes a discussion of South African adoption literature on cultural implications, public perceptions, adoptive parents, social worker involvement, medical guidelines and searching adoptees. Moreover, it is evident from the literature that adult adoptees' views on adoption are lacking. Therefore, perspectives on adoption from other communities or groups in society are reported in a separate section. This begins with a discussion of the financial benefits and societal value of adoption. Then other adoption perspectives are provided by individuals dealing with infertility, various religious denominations, adoption research, children, adoptive parents, society and the media. Other topics of relevant research with adult adoptees as participants are reported on in the final section of this chapter. These research topics, which are divided into four subsections, include the effects of age on adoption placement, experiences of adoption disclosure, psychological adjustment, psychosocial dysfunction, psychosocial well-being, searching adoptees, attachment effects on adjustment and, lastly, adoption identity.

2.2 The South African context

Regarding adoption policy, the current Children's Act (No 38 of 2005) first advocates kinship care, then adoption, and considers residential or institutional care as the last option (Rochat et

al., 2015). Kinship care remains the preferred choice for alternative childcare in South Africa. Although kinship care is culturally more acceptable in South Africa, it is not the focus of this research. Furthermore, kinship care has become a very difficult family system for biological relatives to maintain due to the impact of the HIV/AIDS pandemic, which has resulted in impoverished grandparents and child-headed households (Barnett & Whiteside, 2006). Furthermore, child abandonment is on the increase, indicating the inability of biological relatives to care for the child(ren) (Blackie, 2014).

It is important to mention various influencing factors surrounding adoption, such as circumstances, preferences or lack of knowledge, because these affect perspectives on adoption. Therefore, the various concerns regarding orphaned children and their possible vulnerability are discussed in the next few paragraphs. This is accompanied by a debate in the literature concerned with HIV/AIDS orphans, child-headed households and abandoned children. It includes presenting the various statistics on the number of orphans in need of family placement. Although the context is described to show the needs, it does not include the opinions of the adopted person.

Meintjes, Hall, Marera, and Boulle (2010) investigated the causes of child-headed households in South Africa. They reported that most children orphaned by HIV/AIDS have at least one living parent, even though they are living in a child-headed household. Therefore, the children are not completely orphaned, and this raises questions of parental responsibility. Moreover, the researchers emphasised that it was inappropriate to assume all child-headed households are dysfunctional or ineffective, or that they even function as a permanent living arrangement (Meintjes et al., 2010).

Bray (2003) discusses the impact or extent of the social consequences for children orphaned by HIV/AIDS. Both Bray (2003) and Meintjes et al. (2010) argue that the welfare of children orphaned by HIV/AIDS should not be isolated from that of other at-risk children. According to Bray (2003) there is insufficient evidence that the HIV/AIDS pandemic has resulted in an unmanageable increase in the number of orphans. Bray (2003) also argues that some researchers may have dismissed the support capacity of the traditional African family system when they state that families are not coping with orphaned relatives. Bray (2003) further states that, when statistics on the increase in the number of children orphaned by HIV/AIDS are reported, this appears to be done to induce fear in society. The idea is to increase society's assistance of orphans by convincing them that the lack of involvement might create a large

proportion of social delinquents and thereby affect the fabric of society in the future. Furthermore, as reported by Bray (2003), there is no recorded evidence that orphaned children will experience disastrous futures. Bray (2003) also argues that the general research on the vulnerability of orphans refrains from acknowledging the possibility of child resilience. Therefore, the debate appears to be whether an intervention such as adoption is even necessary.

In contrast to Bray (2003), Gerrand and Nathane-Taulela (2015) state that child abandonment has made it difficult to maintain kinship ties, which would be one source of care or opportunity for adoption. The latter researchers discuss the existing challenges to increasing the adoption rate when focusing on abandonment. In addition, Gerrand and Nathane-Taulela (2015) found that some biological mothers believe that, in situations where psychological, social, emotional, financial or physical resources are limited within the biological family, child abandonment secures a better future for the child. This belief in abandonment is not necessarily valid, because most prospective black adoptive parents want to know the ancestral background of a child before they proceed with adoption (Blackie, 2014).

In 2004, Townsend and Dawes reported on the willingness of foster and adoptive parents to care for children orphaned by HIV/AIDS. A sample of 175 South African participants took part in the study. Townsend and Dawes (2004) found that it was plausible to assume that there would be a growing number of orphaned children in the next 10 years and they projected a total of between 3.6 and 4.8 million orphans by 2015. In 2010 it was reported that there were an estimated two million adoptable orphans in South Africa (Haeri Mazanderani et al., 2014). Moreover, Blackie (2014) stated that there are many regulations involved in certifying an orphaned child as adoptable. Therefore, irrespective of the research discussed by Bray (2003) regarding kinship care, the presence of adoptable children needing family placement indicates that kinship care is not always possible.

Although very valid points are made in the research studies by both Bray (2003) and Townsend and Dawes (2004), it is essential to mention that Townsend and Dawes (2004) did not deny the resilience of children, but focused on creating awareness of the needs of orphans, all of whom might not necessarily be resilient. Moreover, Townsend and Dawes's (2004) research rationale was that the lack of sufficient adoptive and foster care options would place orphans at risk of homelessness, poverty, exploitation, abuse and educational difficulties. Their research findings revealed that there was a 96% willingness by participants to care for children orphaned by HIV/AIDS. However, boys and children over the age of six were less likely to be adopted. It

further was revealed that adoptive and foster parents have a greater willingness to care for an HIV-positive child than for an HIV-negative child (Townsend & Dawes, 2004).

The concern about orphan statistics, children orphaned by HIV/AIDS and child abandonment has been the main focus of the research discussed thus far. This is important, as it illustrates the reasons why an increase in South African adoptions has become necessary. However, research and knowledge about the broad topic of adoption are still lacking in South Africa (Mokomane et al., 2012; Scordilis, 2006). Based on the need to cope with orphaned and abandoned children, the South African Department of Social Development is attempting to address the low adoption rate by initiating research on adoption (Mokomane et al., 2012). The availability of South African adoption research is relevant, as it would assist in developing a culturally appropriate adoption model for South Africa that will engage prospective adoptive parents (Gerrand & Nathane-Taulela, 2015). The adoption research that has been conducted in South Africa is the focus of the next section.

2.3 South African adoption literature

As discussed in Chapter 1, South African research regarding perspectives on adoption was conducted by Rochat et al. (2015) on public perceptions, beliefs and experiences of fostering and adoption. The aim of the Rochat et al. (2015) research was to investigate barriers to adoption. The researchers utilised six homogenous focus groups in a national study, namely related foster parents, non-related foster parents, adoptive parents, prospective adoptive parents, non-adoptive parents, and childless adults (Rochat et al., 2015), but they excluded adult adoptees as participants. The responses by the various focus groups in the Rochat et al. (2015) research study explored the perceptions, beliefs and experiences of adoption that influenced the decision to adopt a child. Using thematic analysis in their study, three themes emerged as barriers to adoption: 1) the social context – socioeconomic, which is the inability to care for children without a subsidy, and socio-cultural aspects, which are caused by the preference for kinship care and ancestral views, 2) the service context – access to and quality of adoptive services are not effective, and 3) the knowledge context – public awareness and access to information is limited (Rochat et al., 2015). However, the Rochat et al. (2015) study lacks a holistic public perception inclusive of adoptees. The study was well designed to identify important themes of fostering and adoption, but ignored the possibility that an adoptee's perspective might have provided additional insight on the topic.

Groves (2012) has added another South African perspective on adoption, namely that provided by adoptive parents. The aim of his research was to identify themes that influenced adoptive parents' opinions of adoption. Groves (2012) interviewed three couples to investigate their experiences of adoption and thematically analysed each couple's responses. Although his research findings may be limited due to the small sample size, the findings suggest that society, including the extended family, has a large impact on how adoptive parents experience or view adoption (Groves, 2012). One adoptive couple experienced the loss of their adoptive child when the biological mother reclaimed the child. Groves (2012) reveals in the results that the adoptive mother expressed her trauma as being the same as she would have felt losing a biological child. Additionally, adoptive parents felt that the available adoption leave (leave granted to adoptive parents following the adoption of a child) was inadequate because more time is needed for the initial bonding with the adopted child (Groves, 2012). Based on the study's findings, Groves (2012) recommends that family therapy is the appropriate therapeutic approach to adoption-related difficulties and that adoptive parents need just as much support as the adopted child.

Furthermore, the Mokomane et al. (2012) study in South Africa evaluated adoption trends and patterns in social work practices. Their primary research aim was to identify adoption-related attitudes, knowledge and experiences in social work practice from the perspective of 15 social welfare informants. The study was conducted to highlight barriers that prevent an increase in adoptions and a better quality of adoption practice (Mokomane et al., 2012). The findings from the perspectives of social welfare workers are three-fold, namely 1) the interpretation or understanding of adoption processes is problematic, even within the judicial system; 2) the application of adoption legislature is often frustrating due to the lack of infrastructure; and 3) social workers who maintain a personal prejudice towards certain prospective adoptive parents (e.g. same-sex couples) will not proceed with the adoption process (Mokomane et al., 2012). Although, the research suggests that social workers generally do not have a negative attitude towards adoption or the practice of adoption, the process seems to be daunting.

According to guidelines by the South African National Department of Social Development, there is the added expectation of completing a medical report on children before adoption may proceed (Haeri Mazanderani et al., 2014). Considering that there were no established guidelines for such a medical examination, a forum was collated for this purpose and was discussed at a forum entailing an open discussion at the University of Pretoria in March 2013. An article in the *South African Medical Journal* reported on the suggested recommendations for this medical

examination of a child prior to adoption placement (Haeri Mazanderani et al., 2014). The forum was attended by a variety of adoption stakeholders who shared their views of adoption in the hope of improving the quality of adoption practices (Haeri Mazanderani et al., 2014). The forum stated that the required medical examination would ensure that adopted children would continue to receive appropriate health care depending on the outcome of the medical report. Also, a medical examination would assist prospective adoptive parents by informing them of possible difficulties or the added responsibility to be placed on them following the adoption.

However, the forum also reported that the required medical examination was an idealistic idea because all the relevant state departments in South Africa were not working cohesively, specifically with regard to adoption, and the departments lacked resources to support such a policy in a functional manner (Haeri Mazanderani et al., 2014). The forum's report on the lack of infrastructure is congruent with the social workers' perspectives revealed previously in the Mokomane et al. (2012) study. A concern not highlighted by the forum was that prospective adoptive parents would be able to adopt a child purely based on the child's medical results. The forum's perspective on adoption appears influenced by their concern for the mental and physical well-being of the child (Haeri Mazanderani et al., 2014), but the medical examination may create the impression in society that adoptable children are possibly born vulnerable.

In a South African study conducted by Scordilis (2006), eight adult adoptees were interviewed about their search for and reunion with their birth mothers. Scordilis's (2006) study revealed that the motivation of the searching adoptees to connect with their birth mother was to reclaim the lost object-of-self or birth mother. Even though some participants experienced a negative reunion, they still believed it to be profound due to it filling a personal need for connection. Scordilis (2006) also states that adoptees' search for their birth mother is a positive process that can establish an integrated self-concept. She claims that her findings are in line with international research because they resonated with research findings in the United Kingdom and USA (Scordilis, 2006). The similarity in the results reported by Scordilis (2006) to international research findings encouraged me to elaborate on the international literature on adoption and adult adoptees.

The research reported in this section contributes towards an understanding of adoption in South Africa and the various factors influencing adoption, namely the lack of research, the financial responsibility of adoption, access to adoption services, cultural barriers, limited adoption knowledge, societal impact, social work practices, challenging adoption procedures, and the

searching experience. Although only a limited number of South African studies on adoption have been done, some of them are relevant to the current study. Moreover, considering the lack of perspectives on adoption of adult adoptees in South African studies, the next section provides a review of adoption perspectives from outside of South Africa.

2.4 International perspectives on adoption

Adoption research trends, topics and outcomes were discussed in a literature review article by Palacios and Brodzinsky (2010), which is significant because they took into account all adoption research conducted since it became a field of study. Palacios and Brodzinsky (2010) state that most adoption research involves children and adolescents. Furthermore, the researchers developed a historical timeline and noted three trends in adoption research, namely 1) adoption risk factors and comparative studies (adoptee versus non-adoptee functioning); 2) the ability of adopted children to recover from possible adversity prior to their adoption; and 3) biological, psychosocial, and contextual factors and processes that influence the capacity of adoptees to adjust (Palacios & Brodzinsky, 2010). Therefore, Palacios and Brodzinsky's (2010) article was helpful to identify the lack of research on adult adoptees' perspectives on adoption. Consequently, the current research aims to highlight adoption perspectives, and therefore the applicable adoption research conducted is the focus of further discussion.

2.4.1 The value of adoption

Hansen (2007) discusses the value of adoption in the USA from an economic perspective. She evaluated the cost to government of investing in adoption compared to foster care. Hansen (2007) notes that, as adoptions increased, so did post-adoption services, leading to an increase in the government's cost of services. Hansen's (2007) research was conducted because of the government's possible legislative withdrawal of post-adoption service funding. She focused on providing the financial breakdown of the costs involved to government when a child remained in foster care compared to an adopted child (Hansen, 2007). Her study aimed to illustrate whether adoption or foster care would provide the best economic decision for government to promote and support financially. The researcher used eight years of case histories from previous research conducted by Barth and his co-authors in 2006 to estimate the costs involved in adoption and foster care (Hansen, 2007). Hansen (2007) reports that, when compared to foster care, adoption provides greater opportunities to obtain a higher income in adulthood, and adoptees are less likely to be involved in crime or be imprisoned. Overall, the research suggests

that, from an economic perspective on adoption versus foster care, adoption is a more productive investment for the US government (Hansen, 2007).

Rulli (2014) published a philosophical and empirical discussion on the unique value of adoption. The aim of Rulli's (2014) writing was to highlight her perspective on adoption against other adoption perspectives. Rulli (2014) believes that adoption holds its own unique value, as well as adding value to the lives of adoptable children and prospective parents. She states that adoption itself has value because it is an act of respect for the sanctity of life by opening your home to a stranger (Rulli, 2014). Adopted children experience the value of adoption by being placed with a family. Additionally, adoptive parents may experience personal transformation and growth as a result of learning to love a child who is not biologically connected to them (Rulli, 2014). Rulli (2014) also states that planning for parenthood should focus on the already living children who have critical need of a family. She argues that, instead of utilising artificial reproductive technologies (ART) to procreate, it would be more beneficial for couples to adopt a child who already exists. Considering that the philosophical value of adoption has been discussed positively by Rulli (2014), it is also important to continue the discussion by presenting other perspectives on adoption by prospective parents who are struggling or unable to conceive children and possibly utilising ART.

2.4.2 Adoption and infertility

Jennings (2010) researched the contrast between infertility and adoption choices by comparing the process of ART with the decision to adopt. The researcher interviewed fourteen infertile women and three adoption experts in the USA. Jennings (2010) discusses how infertile women have to navigate through expectations from within society and their own personal experience of infertility before developing their own opinion of adoption. The researcher interviewed and observed women in two different support groups for over a year. The two groups were an ART treatment group and an adoption support group. The participants suggested that God and religious beliefs had other plans for their goal of family formation, thereby altering their views of adoption. Jennings (2010) reports that almost all the women in the adoption support group began with ART treatment and consequently considered adoption after treatment had failed. She further reports in the research findings that the women's perspectives on adoption were an interplay between medical advancement and religious beliefs. According to Jennings (2010), this thought process led these women from the struggle of infertility to an acceptance thereof and generally resulted in a decision to adopt. Therefore, compared to Rulli's (2014) view on

the value of adoption, the reality is that for some prospective parents it is a process to accept adoption as a pathway to parenthood.

In another study, infertile couples were interviewed to reveal their views on adoption based on their experience of adoption in Canada (Daniluk & Hurtig-Mitchell, 2003). The research sample consisted of 39 infertile (heterosexual) couples who had adopted one or more children during the previous five years and included both domestic and international adoptions. Thirty-seven couples reported initially viewing adoption as a secondary option for family formation. Similar to Grove's (2012) findings in South Africa (discussed in the previous section), Daniluk and Hurtig-Mitchell (2003) also found that the couples were fearful of the social stigma related to adoption, including the responses of their extended families. The male spouses were also concerned about managing infringements on their human rights, because they experienced injustice within the adoption system that they felt unable to challenge (Daniluk & Hurtig-Mitchell, 2003). The couples mentioned realising that adoption helped heal the emotional wounds and experiences of infertility. The participants also affirmed their belief that they had a greater capacity for parenthood based on the challenges they had overcome to adopt and become parents. Lastly, the couples stated that adoption created an opportunity to achieve their dream of becoming a family (Daniluk & Hurtig-Mitchell, 2003).

Omosun and Kofoworola (2011) conducted adoption research with 350 women attending infertility clinics in Nigeria. Their research objective was to identify the knowledge, attitudes and practice of adoption in Lagos by utilising an administered questionnaire. The researchers mention that people in Africa place a high value on procreation within the family setting, because children add pride and economic fortune to the family (Omosun & Kofoworola, 2011). Women are shunned for their inability to produce children within their marriage and adoption is therefore not believed to be a solution to infertility. According to the women, adoption was considered a humanitarian decision, as they would be rescuing an abandoned child (Omosun & Kofoworola, 2011). The women's beliefs reflected that the view of family formation might differ on the basis of various ethnic and cultural backgrounds.

Another study on women, done in the USA by Park and Hill (2014), explored the idea of femininity being linked to reproduction. This research aimed to determine whether 876 childless women perceived adoption as an option for motherhood. The researchers reported that the women who valued motherhood and had already sought fertility treatment expressed a positive view of adoption. Park and Hill (2014) used Risman's theory of gender as a social

structure and linked it to the need women have to fulfil reproduction expectations as an indicator of femininity against their meaning of motherhood. This research contributes to identifying how the value of motherhood shapes adoption views when considering pro-natalism ideologies (Park & Hill, 2014). However, the research did not suggest how the stigmas of both infertility and adoption may have affected the adoption views of the participants (Park & Hill, 2014). In their findings, Park and Hill (2014) report that women who placed a higher value on motherhood than on procreation perceived adoption as just another pathway to motherhood.

2.4.3 Adoption and religion

Failingner (2012) examined adoption from a religious perspective in the USA. She chose to conduct research specifically within the Lutheran community from within a personal theological focus. Failingner (2012) reports that Lutherans believed all people involved in the adoption process should be treated as God's unique gifts to each other, without discrimination according to society's ideas of unconventional parents or difficult children. She further suggests that Lutherans believe that all God's people have a role to play in loving each other, and that adoption is a positive response to a child's need for love. Therefore, adoption is congruent with Lutheran traditions. It is important to note that the Lutherans were only opposed to adoption when a child had to be relinquished for adoption by their families purely on the basis of poor economic circumstances (Failingner, 2012). The Lutheran community suggested that in these situations there is a responsibility to assist the struggling biological family in other ways that would enable the family to continue their lives together (Failingner, 2012).

However, not all religious denominations share the same ideals or views about adoption. A study conducted by Inhorn (2006) in Lebanon investigated the influence of different Muslim sects on Middle Eastern Muslim men's perspectives on adoption. The research sample consisted of 220 Lebanese, Syrian and Lebanese Palestine men. Inhorn (2006) found that Muslim religious law advocates informal care for the various needs of orphans, but does not permit the practice of adoption. The reasons for this religious law are not prejudice towards adoption, but a belief that each person should honour their blood relationship with their own child because a child is a gift from God (Inhorn, 2006). According to Muslim belief, parents are morally bound to care for their own children and protect their lineage, which is also believed to result in a positive impact on society (Inhorn, 2006). However, Inhorn (2006) reports that, if necessary, some Muslim men would consider adoption as an opportunity for family formation to fulfil their desire for having a family, even though their religion does not support it.

2.4.4 Adopted children

Previous adoption research has also contributed to perspectives on adoption. An adoption research meta-analysis conducted by Van IJzendoorn and Juffer (2005) focused on the cognitive developmental benefits of adoption for children. The researchers reported that adoption improved the adopted person's cognitive competence when compared to peers in foster or institutional care, and they concluded that adoption is a successful alternative care intervention. However, the meta-analysis focused solely on cognitive competence, which ignores other important areas of child development. Moreover, Palacios and Brodzinsky (2010) recommend that it would be interesting to investigate the meaning adoptees from different backgrounds attach to adoption. Therefore, in the next few paragraphs I discuss research on adopted children's views from within their different contexts.

In Australia, Michail (2013) engaged in a literature review of children's perspectives on different care settings, including adoption. The reviewed literature consisted of research from the United Kingdom, the USA and Australia. Michail (2013) suggests that, in previous research, children viewed adoption differently and individually expressed mixed emotions. The children considered the lack of biological family contact as difficult and affirmed that their adoptive parents should relay consistent adoption information (Michail, 2013). The adoptees also mentioned that adoption should not separate them from their siblings and that there is a possibility of experiencing social stigma, especially among non-adopted peers. Another two opinions revealed in the literature are that foster care prior to adoption should be limited and that being an adoptee can be isolating, which could be addressed by meeting other adoptees (Michail, 2013). Unfortunately, Michail (2013) did not categorise the children's opinions according to the different countries and therefore did not address the context-related recommendation stated in the previous paragraph by Palacios and Brodzinsky (2010).

Hawkins et al. (2007) researched the experience of inter-country (adopted outside of child's country of birth) and domestic adoption from a child's point of view in the United Kingdom. They conducted a comparative study of 180 eleven-year-old adoptees. The research aimed to quantitatively investigate the different views of adoption of the two groups of children and how the age of placement affected their view on adoption. The researchers believe that discovering a child's view on adoption could possibly improve the services they receive. Hawkins et al. (2007) compared domestically adopted children who were placed before the age of six months with Romanian inter-country adopted children who were placed between birth and 42 months and had experienced deprivation before placement. Both groups of children reported that being

adopted did not affect their lives and that they felt no different from their non-adopted peers. Further findings suggest that there were few differences in the perspectives on adoption between these two groups when age of placement was no later than six months of age, irrespective of their country of origin (Hawkins et al., 2007).

In a research study by Neil (2012), she qualitatively explored perspectives on adoption during middle childhood in the United Kingdom. The research aimed at understanding the manner in which adopted children make sense of adoption. Forty-three children aged between five and thirteen years participated in the study. Neil's (2012) research revealed that most of the children were well adjusted within their adoptive families. Moreover, a quarter of the children were not ready to explore their meaning of adoption, another quarter felt their view on adoption was positive, and the other half reported complex emotions about being adopted. Overall, Neil's (2012) findings reveal that the children viewed adoption as natural. Additionally, discomfort with their adoption occurred mostly when exposed to stigma within their social networks, e.g. at school. The research provided some insight into how children develop their perspective on adoption (Neil, 2012). However, the research lacked clarity, as it claimed to focus on exploring the children's feelings about adoption, which was not evident in the results. It seemed that the research was not completely about the adoptees' perspectives on adoption, but instead only highlighted the children's experiences of their adoption status (Neil, 2012). Consequently, the perspective is inclusive of experiences, as described previously in the definition of adoption in the introduction chapter. Therefore, the abovementioned research results and the following research to be reported are both considered relevant to the current study.

2.4.5 Adoption openness in the family

Hawkins et al. (2008) researched the adoption experiences of adopted children and their adoptive parents in the United Kingdom, involving domestic ($n = 40$) and inter-country ($n = 122$) adoptees. The aim of the research was to investigate whether openness in the discussion of adoption within the family would have an impact on the adoptees' perspective on adoption. The majority of adoptive parents reported not having difficulty discussing adoption with their children, and the adoptees agreed that their parents were comfortable with discussing adoption (Hawkins et al., 2008). However, the adoptees at age 15 reported experiencing relative difficulty talking about adoption compared to their adoptive parents. The Hawkins et al. (2008) research findings reveal that the adoptees expressed a positive view on adoption when they felt that they experienced a high level of openness in communication about adoption. The research findings also confirm that the children expressed positivity about being adopted and the

adoptive parents believed that their children had few adoption issues when communicative openness was present (Hawkins et al., 2008).

2.4.6 Post-adoption services

Dhami, Mandel, and Sothman (2007) researched the influence of post-adoption services regarding its impact on the adoptive family's perspectives on adoption. The researchers investigated the effectiveness of the post-adoption services provided by the Adoption Support Program in Canada. The aim of the study was to identify how the availability and quality of post-adoption services affected adoptive families' perspectives on adoption (Dhami et al., 2007). Dhami et al. (2007) conclude that post-adoption services need to be consistent and remain relevant but, most importantly, these services should be advertised effectively. The researchers suggest that when adoptive families receive great support it has an impact on their experience of adoption and therefore on their perspective on adoption (Dhami et al., 2007). It is possible to assume that both the advertising of post-adoption services and the positive responses of adoptive parents would influence the public perspective on adoption. In addition, prospective adoptive parents may be encouraged to adopt based on positive and visible post-adoption services.

2.4.7 Adoption in the media

Creedy (2000) analysed influences on public perception by studying the adoption opinions revealed in media in the USA. The researcher examined the views of adoption as presented by different types of televised media and by celebrities. Creedy (2000) discussed only six programmes and mentioned that tabloid journalism continued to create a negative perspective on adoption by highlighting situations that instil fear of adoption in the general public. However, celebrity adoptive parents and adoptees viewed adoption as a positive experience (Creedy, 2000). Other media research conducted by Kline, Karel and Chatterjee (2006) in the USA analysed the content of 292 adoption news broadcasts that appeared between 2001 and 2004 to reveal perspectives on adoption. Their findings of the media's perspectives reveal that adoptive parents are mostly portrayed in a positive way, adoptees are generally portrayed negatively in various behavioural aspects, while the biological parents were judged negatively for their decision to relinquish their child. Following the media perspective research conducted in the USA, Maxwell and Cook (2014) from the United Kingdom decided to research the portrayal of the adopted child in British newspapers and magazines. The researchers used content analysis on a sample of 75 news articles published between November 2009 and May 2012.

Their analysis of the British media showed that “the results indicated that adoptees were portrayed sympathetically as having problems, needing support and being vulnerable. Also, there was evidence of positive portrayal of adoptees. In addition, the news items portrayed adoptees as having negative early experiences” (Maxwell & Cook, 2014, p. 318). The researchers conclude that the British media reveal a plausible but insufficient consideration of the reality of adoption.

The perspectives on adoption mentioned previously originated from other adoption role players, communities, the media and society at large, which may be comparable to the perspectives indicated by adult adoptees in the current research. Considering the broader perspectives provided in this section, and the lack of research on the perspectives of the adult adoptee, it is important that in the next section I discuss research conducted on adult adoptees. This is relevant to the current study’s and may provide insight into the adult adoptee as the participant in the current study.

2.5 Various research themes including adult adoptees as participants

The review of adoption literature by Zamostny, O’Brien, Baden and Wiley (2003), which focused on history, trends and social context, concluded that adult adoptee research has focused mainly on the psychological challenges of searching for biological relatives and the reunion of adult adoptees with their biological relatives. Three further adoption research focus areas regarding adult adoptees have been identified through a further review of the adoption literature. The identified focus areas are the experience of searching for a biological relative (Scordilis, 2006), the effect that age at placement with the adoptive family has on an adoptee (Decker & Omori, 2009; Howe, Shemmings, & Feast, 2001), and the experience of adoption disclosure (Wydra, O’Brien, & Merson, 2012). These themes and related topics are discussed further in this section and are divided into subsections. The subsections are: The impact of age at placement on adoption; the effects of adoption disclosure in adulthood; psychosocial functioning of adult adoptees; and adoption identity.

2.5.1 The impact of age at adoption placement on adoption

According to research on the age of placement, data collected from 472 adult adoptees in a study conducted by Howe and Feast in the United Kingdom in 2000 yielded two publications – by Howe et al. (2001) and by Howe (2001). Both Howe et al. (2001) and Howe (2001) combined the evaluation of adoption experiences by adult adoptees with the age of their

adoption placement to determine how the age at which a child was adopted influenced the adoption experience. The first publication, by Howe et al. (2001), analysed the adoptees' evaluation of their experience of being adopted with the aim of identifying themes according to age of placement. The researchers reported that adoptees placed at a later stage were more likely to rate their adoption experience negatively and have more difficulty connecting with their adoptive families than adoptees placed before the age of one (Howe et al., 2001). The second publication, by Howe (2001), confirmed these findings.

In another study, Decker and Omori (2009) focused on the relationship between the adoptee's age at adoption and his/her educational levels, socioeconomic status and psychosocial well-being in adulthood. The research sample consisted of 141 adult adoptees selected from a national longitudinal survey conducted in the USA. Decker and Omori's (2009) research findings reveal that, by their mid-thirties, irrespective of age at adoption placement, adoptees are similar in two life areas: socioeconomic status and psychosocial wellbeing. Decker and Omori's (2009) research findings complement the research reported by Howe et al. (2001) regarding the age of placement for adoption. Decker and Omori's (2009) research focused on adoption outcomes and Howe et al. (2001) on adoption experiences. Therefore, the research findings in both Decker and Omori (2009) – considering that adoptees' psychosocial functioning are the same by adulthood – and Howe et al. (2001) – ensuring diverse adoption perspectives based on possibly negative and positive adoption experiences – influenced my decision not to include an adoption age criterion in my sample. The current study reports on themes that emerged from adult adoptees' perspectives on adoption, without focusing on the age at adoption.

2.5.2 The effects of adoption disclosure in adulthood

Research conducted by Wydra et al. (2012) in the USA explored the experience of adoption disclosure with a sample of 18 adult adoptees. The aim of their study was to evaluate the impact of different adoption disclosure approaches on adoptees' views of adoption. The research findings indicate that the adoptees who were comfortable with their adoption status experienced an open and communicative family environment, specifically about the topic of their adoption. Conversely, adoptees that were not comfortable with their adoption status experienced problematic disclosure, such as limited adoption information, and they struggled to communicate about their adoption within the family unit. Interestingly, the research findings on communicative openness for adult adoptees (Wydra et al., 2012) are similar to the children's views reported in the previous section by Hawkins et al. (2008). It is also important to note that

the sample in the Wydra et al. (2012) study was a racially diverse group, which is relevant to research in South Africa. However, adoptees who were adopted before the age of one had been selected to participate in the Wydra et al. (2012) study, whereas I had no adoption age requirement for participants in this study. Adoption disclosure is relevant to the current study as it was mentioned by the adoptees during the research interviews.

2.5.3 Psychosocial functioning of adult adoptees

It is of importance to know whether adult adoptees are functioning well in adulthood because their level of psychological functioning may be related to their perspectives on adoption. Participants in the Borders, Penny, and Portnoy (2000) study in the USA were asked to complete a survey that focused on specific variables regarding psychosocial well-being reported in the adoption literature and considered relevant to their psychosocial developmental phase. Borders et al. (2000) compared the responses of 100 adoptees with the responses of their non-adopted friends to identify whether there were similarities and differences in psychosocial well-being between adopted and non-adopted adults. The Borders et al. (2000) findings reveal that adult adoptees manage adulthood in a significantly similar way to their non-adopted peers. Moreover, when comparing the results of searching adoptees with non-searching adoptees, it was noted that searching adoptees' scores were linked to lower self-esteem, lower family support and higher depression than those of the non-searching adoptees (Borders et al., 2000). These particular findings are significant because the current study's sample consists only of searching adoptees. However, according to Baden and Wiley (2007), the searching process by adoptees should be considered a normal developmental pathway and should not be attached prematurely to psychosocial issues.

In determining the psychological functioning of adult adoptees in the USA, Pearson, Curtis, and Chapman (2007) decided to research the use of mental health services by including 156 adult adoptees who were adopted as infants in their study. Their findings indicate that less than 12% of adoptees reported seeking help with psychological issues, and those who did mostly made use of informal sources such as friends and family (Pearson et al., 2007). It was also reported that, generally, women more than men sought support or professional counselling for their life concerns (Pearson et al., 2007). Pearson et al. (2007) state that the lack of help-seeking behaviour was not an indication of the absence of psychological issues in adoptees. Therefore, the researchers suggest that many adoptees who experience psychological issues do not utilise mental health services.

In another study in the USA, Cubito and Brandon (2000) researched the psychological adjustment of 716 adult adoptees by assessing their distress, depression and anger. Cubito and Brandon (2000) then compared the adoptees' adjustment scores to non-adoptees' adjustment scores, found in previous research by Zung in 1971 and Knight et al. in 1983. Cubito and Brandon's (2000) research findings reveal that adoptees generally score higher on psychological maladjustment than their non-adopted peers. However, the adoptees' scores were still within the normal range, thereby not displaying maladjustment levels requiring outpatient mental health services. Cubito and Brandon (2000) state that their findings may be limited due to the use of normative scores (scores developed to represent the norm in the general population on a specific variable, e.g. psychological adjustment) and recommend that future research should instead utilise control groups to compare scores.

Research that also focused on the psychological adjustment of adoptees was conducted in Israel by Levy-Shiff (2001), who included a control group (non-adoptees), thereby addressing the recommendation of Cubito and Brandon (2000). Moreover, Levy-Shiff (2001) aimed to compare the psychological adjustment of 91 adoptees and 91 non-adoptees in adulthood. She used a longitudinal study, started when the participants were 18 years of age and continuing when those participants were approximately 28 years of age (Levy-Shiff, 2001). The researcher aimed to explore whether adoptees were at a higher risk for maladjustment in adulthood. Levy-Shiff (2001) found a strong correlation between adoptees' adjustment in adulthood and their family environment. The research findings reveal that, in both groups, the participants who felt that their family environment was positive, healthy and encouraging during adolescence had a higher self-concept and showed lower levels of psychopathology (e.g., depression, anxiety and psychosis) (Levy-Shiff, 2001). However, the research results also indicate that adoptees scored lower on self-concept and higher on pathological symptoms compared to their non-adopted peers. Adoptees also scored their families lower than non-adoptees in relation to family environment on the dimensions of family relations, personal growth and family system maintenance (Levy-Shiff, 2001). These research findings are significant, as they indicate that the family environment and identity development are interlinked, which is similarly the premise for the integration of Family Systems Theory and Psychosocial Theory in the theoretical framework of the current study

In the USA, Müller, Gibbs, and Ariely (2002) intended to add further insight into searching adoptees' psychological functioning and adoption experience using a research sample consisting of 345 adult adoptees in an age range from 19 to 71 years. The participants were all

searching adoptees, which is relevant to the sample in the current research. The researchers focused on identifying the predicting factors that influence adoptees' psychological functioning and adoption experience in adulthood. Miiller et al. (2002) claim that developing an understanding of the variables (open adoption communication, psychological similarity and disclosure methods) that affect attachment security could assist in predicting the psychological functioning and adoption experience of adoptees. According to these researchers, a secure attachment is strengthened by open adoption communication and psychological similarity (e.g. similar thinking patterns and personality traits) within the adoptive family (Miiller et al., 2002). The research findings indicate that good psychological functioning occurs when there is a secure attachment within the adoptive family, which contributes to high self-esteem and high life satisfaction. Additionally, Miiller et al. (2002) reported that the adoptees' adoption experience was positive when attachment was secure.

In Australia, Feeney, Passmore, and Peterson (2007) focused their adoption research on attachment security and its impact on relational adjustment in adulthood. The researchers conducted a comparative study with 144 adult adoptees and 131 non-adoptees over a period of six months. The researchers found that attachment security was a predictor of relational adjustment in adulthood. The research findings also reveal that insecure attachment is more prevalent in adoptees than non-adoptees. However, Feeney et al. (2007) reported that parental bonding was more influential in the development of attachment security than adoption. Therefore, the researchers concluded that the quality of the relationship with their parents had a higher impact on attachment in both groups, and that attachment security influenced an individual's adjustment in relationship variables (anxiety, loneliness, relationship quality, etc.) in adulthood (Feeney et al., 2007).

The research reported in this subsection suggests that family environment has a significant impact on the psychosocial well-being of adoptees. Conflicting research was reported about searching adoptees being more vulnerable than non-searching adoptees, which suggests that searching adoptees are not necessarily more at risk for psychosocial difficulties. The research further suggests that, if adoptees are able to form a secure adult attachment, they should adjust well in adulthood.

2.5.4 Adoption identity

According to Erikson (1980), if an individual is unable to form a personal identity, it may affect the value the individual places on relationships, which may lead to isolation. Fall, Roaten and

Eberts (2012) state that adoption status and an unknown biological family history make identity development a more challenging task for adoptees. Consequently, adoptees have long been considered to have a unique identity, which is termed an adoption identity. The following reported research therefore is focused on the influence of adoption on the identity of adult adoptees.

In the USA, Kranstuber and Kellas (2011) investigated adoptees' perceptions of their adoption entrance narratives, which is the story told by the adoptive family about how the adopted child became a part of the family. The researchers hypothesised that the adoptees' perceptions of their entrance narrative had a significant impact on their identity development later in life (Kranstuber & Kellas, 2011). The study included 105 adult adoptee participants, and their age ranged from 18 to 84 years. Seven themes emerged from the adoptees' perceptions of their adoption narratives: Openness, Deception, Chosen child, Fate, Different, Rescue and Reconnection. Two of the seven themes, namely chosen child and reconnection, were identified to have the most significant influence on adoptee identity (Kranstuber & Kellas, 2011). The first theme, chosen child (the adoptees believed their adoptive family intentionally chose them) was reported to develop a secure identity. These adoptees would usually refer to the benefits of adoption based on their adoption experience. The second theme, termed reconnection (the adoptees consistently linked their perceived narratives to reconnecting with their birth parents), is associated with difficulty in identity development in adulthood (Kranstuber & Kellas, 2011).

According to Moyer and Juang (2011), adoption identity is assigned, because adoption is not a choice made by the adoptee. Therefore, Moyer and Juang (2011) investigated how this assigned identity is related to adult adoptees' occupational and parental roles in the USA. The researchers conducted qualitative interviews with ten female participants. The research results indicate that the adoptees associated their adoption experiences with their choices for parenthood, more than with their choice of career (Moyer & Juang, 2011). Furthermore, some of the adoptees were inclined to be community orientated or involved in adoption later in life, either through becoming an adoption worker or an adoptive parent, or by taking advantage of other adoption-related opportunities. In the discussion of their findings, Moyer and Juang (2011) note that one adoptee said she would not adopt children, and another said she was not planning to have children. The participants' responses revealed that adoptees are diverse in their life decisions or choices. Moreover, the research had a limitation as only female participants were included, which does not give insight into how adopted males' identities navigate around occupational and parental goals (Moyer & Juang, 2011).

The literature on adult adoptees reported here appears to reflect that adult adoption research is sometimes contradictory, but usually complex, as affirmed in a review of adoption literature by Baden and Wiley (2007). The adult adoptee research discussed in this chapter focused on age of placement, adoption disclosure, family influences, psychosocial dysfunction, searching adoptees, attachment, adoption adjustment, adoption identity, the impact of entrance narratives, and adoptees' awareness of adoption difficulties. All the previous findings correspond with a review article about adoption (Zamostny et al., 2003), which revealed that it is not possible to view adoptees as a homogeneous group because adoption is an independent personal experience. However, most of the research reported positive outcomes, or the possibility thereof, for adult adoptees in adulthood.

2.6 Chapter Conclusion

The necessity for a culturally sensitive adoption model in South Africa is influenced by African culture, where kinship networks are preferred and utilised in the case of parental death to care for orphaned children and to ensure that ancestral ties are maintained. However, there is a difference between the motivation and focus in the research conducted on orphanhood by Bray (2003) and by Townsend and Dawes (2004). Bray (2003) chose a more optimistic view by focusing on the resilience of orphaned children and kinship networks, whereas Townsend and Dawes (2004) focused on the increase in orphans caused by HIV/AIDS. The concern based on the research by Townsend and Dawes (2004) is that the kinship networks available might not be sufficient to cope with the increase in the number of orphans. Additionally, the increase in child abandonment prevents the option of kinship care to continue being the main source of alternative childcare. Therefore, irrespective of the difference in research opinion on the necessity for adoption, orphan statistics and child abandonment indicate that there is a need to improve our understanding of adoption.

Although South African adoption research is limited, recent studies have indicated there is a need to increase the adoption rate. Therefore, adoption in South Africa is being researched to identify culturally sensitive methods to increasing this rate (Gerrand & Nathane-Taulela, 2015). Most South African adoption research has focused on barriers to adoption, infrastructure concerns, the experiences of adoptive parents, and the experience of searching for biological relatives. Unfortunately, these studies have only highlighted practical concerns about factors that influence adoption (e.g. implementation of legislature). However, Scordilis (2006) mentioned that her research findings in South Africa were similar to those from the United Kingdom and the USA. She had a similar research sample as included in the current study,

which suggests that international research may resonate with the current study's findings. Consequently, I discussed adoption perspectives from outside of South Africa.

Rulli (2014) shared her view that there are viable benefits of adoption for all prospective parents. However, infertility seemed to play a major role in the decision to adopt and there remains a preference to have biological children, especially within certain ethnic groups. Other research suggests that individuals who placed a higher value on parenthood than on having biological offspring considered adoption to be just another pathway to becoming parents. Interestingly, stigma concerns for prospective parents regarding adoption were confirmed to be present in South Africa (Groves, 2012), Canada (Daniluk & Hurtig-Mitchell, 2003) and Nigeria (Omosun & Kofoworola, 2011).

Research on the age of placement in the adoptive family provides different views of its effects on adoptees, and the impact of adoption disclosure on adoption outcomes is important to understand. Furthermore, some research findings indicate that searching adoptees are not more vulnerable than non-searching adoptees.

All the research discussed in this chapter reveals the lack of studies about adult adoptees' adoption perspectives. However, research findings have indicated that adoptees function psychosocially in a similar way to non-adoptees in adulthood. This suggests that adoption research has ignored adult adoptees' perspectives on adoption as a great resource to assist our understanding of adoption, which is the motivation of the current study.

In conclusion, there are two consistent themes present in adoption research: the influence of family environment (Miiller et al., 2002) and identity development (Kranstuber & Kellas, 2011) in creating a positive adoption experience, as well as a positive adoption perspective. This led me to implement the theoretical framework that is discussed in the next chapter.

Chapter 3

Theoretical Framework

3.1 Introduction

Various theories are utilised for understanding adoption, but empirical research that supports adoption theories is limited (Zamostny et al., 2003). Usually, reported studies have been based on pathogenic models (Wegar, 2000). However, the research discussed in Chapter 2 conducted by Borders et al. (2000), which focused on individual development, and Levy-Shiff (2001), which focused on the influence of family functioning on individual development, suggest a conceptual framework that can be used in studies where adult adoptees' perspectives on adoption are of interest.

Moreover, as mentioned in Chapter 1, the United Nations (2009) advocates that a permanent family environment for children promotes their development, and the whole purpose of adoption is the placement of children in a permanent family environment (Mokomane et al., 2012). These two statements highlight the importance of healthy human development within the family.

The first selected theory is Family Systems Theory (Bowen, 1976), because adoption is about family formation. Although adoptive families are stigmatised by society as a deviating form of family (Wegar, 2000), Crosbie-Burnett and Klein (2009) define family not in terms of biological relations, but as the construction of a unit that provides reciprocal relationships inclusive of our basic human needs. The second selected theory is Psychosocial Theory, developed by Erikson (Hook, 2009; Newman & Newman, 2012), because adoption research is also concerned with the personal development of the child. Neither theory is problem-orientated (pathogenic in nature), and both have previously been utilised in adoption research (Brodzinsky, 1987, 1993).

However, the combination of these two theories has no value if it is only stated that the two theories are interrelated (Macleod, 2009). The idea is to engage with the participant's perspective on adoption (as an external event), which is developed within the context of family functioning. The concern with the development of adoptees – influenced by both external and internal events – is an overall linkage between the two theories, as both selected theories are associated with Developmental Psychology.

Bowen's (1976) theory within the field of psychology is concerned with the family connection, which is relevant to the purpose of adoption and the conceptual understanding of the current research. In the next section, I discuss Family Systems Theory as developed by Bowen (1976).

3.2 Family Systems Theory

Family Systems Theory (Bowen, 1976) focuses on the process of family functioning and not the cause of dysfunction (Crosbie-Burnett & Klein, 2009). Family Systems Theory explains the nuclear family system, as well as various subsystems of this system. In 1975, Family Systems Theory was renamed Bowen Theory (Bowen, 1976). This was done to prevent confusion caused by some clinicians who connected this theory to General Systems Theory, which Bowen believed did not include the concept of emotional systems and therefore was not the same as his theory (Bowen, 1976). Bowen (1976) asserts that his theory was not developed from General Systems Theory. This confusion might have been created by the fact that Bowen utilised terms that were already present in the field of science.

Bowen initiated his family research in the search for a theoretical framework by focusing on the mother-child relationship and acknowledged the necessary maintenance of equilibrium in this relationship. It became clear to him that the mother-child relationship interacts within and is also dependent on a family system (Bowen, 1976). Groves (2012) prefers the original theory of Bowen (1976) because he did not attempt to compare any experiences or functioning within the family system with inanimate types of systems, as would be the case in General Systems Theory. The fact that he considered that all human psychological conditions could be identified on a singular continuum of functioning (Bowen, 1976) suggests that even adoption would not be isolated as purely problematic. Instead, the level of functioning of the adoptee is understood according to interactions within the family system (Ribbens McCarthy & Edwards, 2011). This continuum of functioning is clarified further on within the discussion of core principles of Bowen's theory.

The core of Bowen's theory is focused on the system, which involves the intricate creation of equilibrium in family relationships, and it also has to do with the individual's ability to differentiate between feelings and thinking, which Bowen terms differentiation of the self (Bowen, 1976). When developing Family Systems Theory, Bowen (1976) preferred to term mental or psychological illness as emotional illness, which is caused by the dysfunction of the emotional system.

The Bowen (1976) theory constitutes eight concepts. These concepts or principles are: 1) differentiation of self, 2) triangles, 3) nuclear family emotional system, 4) family projection process, 5) emotional cut-off, 6) multigenerational transmission process, 7) sibling position and 8) societal regression. Bowen's theory includes two variables applicable to the concepts found in his theory, which are levels of anxiety and integration of self. These variables influence the emotional system and may result in emotional illness (Bowen, 1976), and are explained in the discussion of each of these concepts.

3.2.1 Differentiation of self

This principle refers to the two opposite experiences of fusion and differentiation, which can be identified on a single continuum. These two variables are dependent on the ability of an individual to manage his/her emotional and intellectual functioning (Bowen, 1976). The manner in which individuals fuse or differentiate between their emotions and intellect determines the manner in which they deal with life. When an individual's emotions and intellect are fused, they are unable to separate their emotional and intellectual functioning. These people usually respond to life experiences through an automatic emotional system (Bowen, 1976). This automatic emotional system consists of responses in life according to their emotional system – with a diminished use of their intellectual system. People who have a fused sense of self are more emotionally dependent on others, and anxiety can easily lead to dysfunction. On the other end of the continuum is the differentiated self, which is a balanced separation of emotional and intellectual functioning. These individuals are more stable and independent in their functioning. They are also more capable of dealing with anxiety or life stressors. Generally, people fall within any of these two ends of the continuum, which then indicates their level of functioning (Bowen, 1976).

Within the framework of differentiation of self there are two further relationship-related variables that influence the individual's ability to function. These variables are termed the solid self and the pseudo-self (Bowen, 1976). The solid self does not fuse emotions with intellect because these individuals are guided by a strong set of beliefs and principles. Even though they engage in relationships, they are less likely to lose their identity because they apply intellectual reasoning in their life choices. The pseudo-self is more fused, because these individuals tend to fuse their identities with others in a relationship and adapt their personalities when confronted by emotional situations. It is the level of differentiation of self that assists us in maintaining a solid self in a relationship (Bowen, 1976).

3.2.2 Triangles

The concept of triangles implies that there is a three-person emotional system. It is the core of an emotional system and a stabilised relationship system (Bowen, 1976). In a family, the triangle consists of the father-mother-child relationship. However, stressors may cause one person in this triangle to turn outside of the system for relief from emotional tension and to obtain support.

The triangle is a beneficial framework to comprehend; the father-mother-child relationship system and the roles developed within this system result in repetitive patterns enacted by the father, mother and child (Bowen, 1976). These repetitive behaviour patterns that occur when tension is present within the triangle are known as the process of family projection. It is important to acknowledge that the emotional system is generally developed from the parent/spouse relationship, which then develops into a triangle as the various children interact with the parents. This emotional system can also involve manipulation within the triangle to relieve stress for one person or to direct the focus away from another person (Bowen, 1976). Subsequently, this concept assumes that all families always have a present mother and father figure to complete the father-mother-child triangle. However, Bowen (1976) does state that triangles occur within other relationships and can be related to other groups, which may imply that it is applicable to grandparent-child households, child-headed households and adoptive families. Therefore, the family is considered a system of interconnected triangles that influence each other (Bowen, 1976).

3.2.3 Nuclear family emotional system

This concept was developed to identify the patterns of emotional functioning in a nuclear family (Bowen, 1976). It has been suggested that some patterns of functioning in family relationships are repeats of family patterns in previous generations. Although family functioning appears to be unique, Bowen claims that, through observation, it is possible to predict family patterns in future generations (Bowen, 1976). Generally, the nuclear family is initiated through the marriage of two people, and they bring their various levels of differentiation of self (as discussed in the first concept), which developed in their families of origin, into this relationship. During their fusion into these respective relationships, an amount of anxiety is caused for either one or both spouses as they attempt to maintain their chosen level of differentiation of self (self-identity) – either with a solid self or a pseudo-self (Bowen, 1976). One response to this anxiety is known as emotional distance, which is present in all

marriages, but in different degrees. However, there are three other important areas in which the degree of fusion or differentiation of self can develop into symptomatic responses (Bowen, 1976). These symptoms are:

- 1) **Marital conflict:** Occurs when there is an inability to compromise within the relationship and a large amount of energy is spent focusing on the relationship. When the couple invests so much in their relationship problems there appears to be less opportunity to involve their children in the conflict. However, it might be unhealthy, as most of their time is spent on the couple's relationship instead of shared energy focused on the nuclear family.
- 2) **Dysfunction or illness in one spouse:** Dysfunction occurs when the fusion of self into the relationship only involves the adaptation of one spouse. This happens when the dominant spouse draws the relationship into his/her pseudo-self (as mentioned in concept one) and takes responsibility for the relationship. This pattern can become unstable if continued, because the adaptive spouse may lose his/her identity, which may result in dysfunction. The dysfunction can be triggered by situations that cause anxiety in the relationship. When anxiety occurs there are different methods in which the adaptive spouse may become dysfunctional, which are physical illness, emotional illness and social illness. It is suggested that the children are not affected by this parental relationship, just as long as they have one well-functioning parent. However, there is a risk of the child developing a caretaking pattern in future relationships.
- 3) **Impairment of one or more children:** This relates to how the parents' fused relationship affects one or more children, causing emotional impairment in the child(ren). It consists of two aspects that can determine the degree of impairment, which are emotional isolation and level of anxiety. Emotional isolation refers directly to the child's disconnect from the relationship system. The level of anxiety is also significant because it determines the intensity of the nuclear family dysfunction. This impairment feeds into the next concept, which is the family projection process.

3.2.4 Family projection process

This concept explains the process by which the parental relationship impairs one or more children in the nuclear family (Bowen, 1976). The concept specifically focuses on the impact of the parental fusion on the father-mother-child triangle, which is the second concept discussed previously. There are different levels of impairment in children, based on the

relationship triangle – this process occurs in various degrees in all families (Bowen, 1976). This is significant because this concept does not differentiate between types of families, such as adoptive families, but instead focuses on the relationship dynamics.

Fusion in the relationship is also termed undifferentiation (Bowen, 1976). The amount of undifferentiation that remains focused within the marital conflict or on the dysfunction of a spouse will diminish the amount directed towards the child/children. When parents can shift their undifferentiation between all three mechanisms – marriage, health and children – as needed, it may decrease the negative effect family projection can cause in one life area (Bowen, 1976). The projection process begins with the ideals that the parents have regarding marriage and children, and the mother's feelings about the child. Children are not equally involved in this emotional process, as it is dependent on the parents. The triangled child is a term used to identify the child who is the object of the family projection process – this is the child who struggles more than the siblings with life adjustment (Bowen, 1976). In this concept it is suggested that the children selected for the family projection process usually are identified through unique factors, which according to the theory are initiated by a stressful conception and birth by the mother.

However, the theory also indicates that other factors, such as being the oldest child, a specific gender, or even the only child may contribute to becoming the triangled child (Bowen, 1976). This concept does not identify directly with adoption, but other selective factors can imply that the family projection may also possibly be directed towards an adopted child. Lastly, the most healthy relationship system that result after family projection has occurred is a child who develops into an individual with differentiation of self apart from the family, and who is capable of adjusting well in life (Bowen, 1976).

3.2.5 Emotional cut-off

This principle was only added to the theory of family systems as a separate concept in 1975 (Bowen, 1976). Family interactions, which prevent or encourage the child's development in differentiation of self, determine the level of unresolved parental attachment. Therefore, the pattern of emotional cut-off that develops in life is initiated by the individual's difficulty in managing unresolved parental attachments. Emotional cut-off is defined by the manner in which a person manages his/her past to ensure functioning in the present (Bowen, 1976). The pattern of emotional cut-off carries into the next generation if parental attachment issues are not resolved (Bowen, 1976). Isolation, separation, withdrawal and denial are words that are

synonymous with the process of emotional cut-off and are linked to the interaction with parents (Bowen, 1976).

The basic premise of this concept is that all individuals have some level of unresolved parental attachment. However, the individual who has low levels of differentiation of self – the inability to separate their emotional and intellectual responses – has a low capacity for managing unresolved emotional parental attachment. Similarly, an individual who has high levels of differentiation of self – the ability to separate their emotional and intellectual responses – has a greater capacity to manage unresolved emotional parental attachment (Bowen, 1976). Furthermore, family behavioural patterns are not necessarily a reflection of genetics or a response to problematic child behaviour, but also the emotional cut-off patterns learned from a past generation. This may suggest that adoptive family patterns are also determined by their adoptive parents' attachment patterns from past generations and not their adoptive status.

Geographical distancing and emotional distancing of self from the family – while still in close contact – are two opposite forms of emotional cut-off (Bowen, 1976). Both extremes are usually a desire for emotional connection, but with an internal inability to connect to their family. The geographical distancing occurs when the individual prefers to have physical distance from the family. The individual who chooses this form of distancing is also suggested to present with an impulsive pattern of behaviour (Bowen, 1976). This individual believes that the parents are the problem and probably struggles to commit to permanent relationships, such as a marriage. They cut off externally and have a tendency to run away when faced with relationship difficulties. The emotional distancing of self leads to more internalised stress responses, such as depression and physical illness (Bowen, 1976). Therefore, it appears that the individual manages his/her negative emotions inwardly.

3.2.6 Multigenerational transmission process

As discussed previously, family projection is usually focused on one child, known as the triangled child. This child, being the object of the projection, has a lower capacity to differentiate between his/her emotional and intellectual systems, which decreases his/her ability to resolve negative parental attachments. This family projection can impact on that child's future generations. The multigenerational transmission process suggests that families can create psychological dysfunction in future generations, based on the fact that the process of family projection can affect the child with such permanence as to cause the pattern to be carried forward. As this pattern intensifies due to the continuous diminished differentiation of

self, it will result in lower-level functioning of a child in a later generation. On the other hand, children who are raised outside of the family projection process, thereby having a higher ability to differentiate between emotional and intellectual functioning, tend to experience stable family life and this positively influences successive generations (Bowen, 1976). Since multigenerational transmission is determined by family process and not by genetics, it could indicate that even an adoptive child's experience of family life may influence his/her future generations, either positively or negatively.

3.2.7 Sibling position

Understanding sibling position provides insight into the theory of family systems (Bowen, 1976). Firstly, the method by which a child becomes the object of the family projection process is partly related to the sibling position. Secondly, the extent to which the child acts differently from the profiles identified for his/her sibling position may indicate the child's levels of differentiation of self, which is related to emotional functioning (Bowen, 1976).

3.2.8 Societal regression

Bowen acknowledges that emotional triangles exist in all relationships, including in society (Bowen, 1976). In terms of this last principle, Bowen attempts to reveal a connection between family functioning and societal functioning. This concept is not fully developed in Bowen's theory, but aims to apply the principles of triangles and the nuclear family system to a societal system. When formulated, this societal system, although only noted in Bowen's theory, would engage a new theory of society as an emotional system (Bowen, 1976). As currently described it suggests that, when there are chronic anxiety levels within a family, the family tends to reduce the anxiety by focusing on emotional responses. Furthermore, when comparing family to society, it is hypothesised that, when society is faced with chronic problems, it too responds emotionally when intellect appears to have failed. This emotional response mechanism in families, and now also as assumed to occur in society (according to Bowen), has brought no positive or constructive change, because purely emotional decisions without the inclusion of the intellectual system are unsuccessful for resolving issues (Bowen, 1976).

3.2.9 Discussion of Bowen's theory

Overall, the eight principles of Bowen's Family Systems Theory discussed above create an understanding of the extent of family influence on child development, thereby contributing to the adoptee's adoption experience and perspective. The most viable aspect of the Bowen theory

relevant to gaining a perspective on adoption is his suggestion for family research, which is the attempt to focus on what had occurred within the family based on factual knowledge provided by the individual through eliciting functional information about their relationship system (Bowen, 1976). However, one criticism of Family Systems Theory is that it might not be culturally sensitive (Ribbens McCarthy & Edwards, 2011). Consequently, Bowen's theory suggests that, as long as the focus remains on factual information, it is possible to conduct verifiable family research, using what Bowen termed as systems thinking (Bowen, 1976). Therefore, it is possible for an adult adoptee to provide a perspective on adoption as part of a family system, from any cultural context, as long as the information provided is factual.

Bowen further believed his theory conceptualised aspects found outside of individual theories (Bowen, 1976). The decision not to develop concepts around individual development indicates that Bowen's theory does not attempt to theorise individual development, such as the phases of psychosocial development. However, Newman and Newman (2012) have stated that psychosocial development is appropriately linked to Systems Theory because it integrates the idea of individual development and the system within which the individual is developing. Therefore, Bowen's theory can complement an individual theory such as Psychosocial Theory, as discussed in the next section.

3.3 Psychosocial Theory

Psychosocial Theory is a stage theory and, according to Macleod (2009), a stage model can be associated with organismic models. Being an organismic model implies that it ignores political, cultural, gendered and social contextual factors that may impact the development of an individual. However, it has been stated that Psychosocial Theory could be integrated with Systems Theory (Ribbens McCarthy & Edwards, 2011), thereby providing a developmental-contextual research perspective. Therefore, after considering the family system of an individual and to further explore the participants' perspectives on adoption, it is logical to consider Psychosocial Theory as an applicable theory.

It also is important to have a conceptual framework of psychosocial development to understand where adoptees currently are in their own development, because participants might have mentioned specific developmental aspects during the data collection interviews. In a comparative study in the USA on the functioning and psychosocial well-being of adult adoptees and their friends, Borders et al. (2000) used a survey to evaluate relevant aspects of their participants' psychosocial stage of generativity as described by Erikson (Newman & Newman,

2012). The research results suggest that there are many similarities regarding functioning and psychosocial well-being between adoptees and their non-adopted peers in adulthood (Borders et al., 2000). The research findings of Borders et al. (2000) indicate that an individual's current developmental stage may be of significance to their life experience/responses, more so than their adoption status. Moreover, adoptees who are in the same psychosocial stage may have more similar perspectives on adoption than adoptees from different psychosocial stages. This aspect influenced me to include participants from the same psychosocial stage in the current study to create a knowledge base that can in the future be compared with the perspectives of adoptees from other psychosocial stages.

The stages of Erikson's psychosocial theory that are relevant to the current study include six of eight stages. These stages are trust versus mistrust (birth to one year), autonomy versus shame (one to three years), initiative versus guilt (three to six years), industry versus inferiority (six to 12 years), identity versus role confusion (12 to 20 years) and intimacy versus isolation (20 to 40 years) (Erikson, 1980). There is no need to focus on the last two stages of Erikson's theory, because they exceed the current research study's age criterion, which is between 20 and 40 years of age. However, considering that human development is a fluid process, the participants' responses may include aspects of the last two stages (Newman & Newman, 2012). The seventh stage is generativity versus stagnation (40 to 65 years), which has been addressed in past research focused on psychosocial development in adoption (Borders et al., 2000). The final stage is integrity versus despair (65 years and older).

Therefore, the applicable six stages of Erikson's psychosocial theory are discussed further, along with the expected virtue of each stage, which can be internalised in the resolution of the relevant stage. According to Hook (2009, p. 285):

Virtues are the psychosocial values of hope, will, purpose, skill, fidelity and love that are the outcome of the healthy resolution of developmental crises. The virtues should not be understood as an evaluation of the individual, but rather as an indication of growing ego strength.

Further on I give a description of the first six stages of Erikson's Psychosocial Theory as interpreted by Hook (2009).

3.3.1 Trust versus mistrust (birth to one year)

According to Hook (2009) the infant is intended to develop a sense of trust in the world as a positive space, which is initiated and cultivated through interaction with the primary caregiver. The trust needs to be developed physiologically and emotionally. The virtue anticipated through the resolution of this stage is hope. Parental care also begins to encourage a sense of identity and it is important to note that the mother is not the only influential person in the infant's growth. Therefore, Erikson is cognisant of the sociocultural context within which the infant grows. Additionally, Hook (2009) explains this stage without making any claims that genetic connection is essential for creating trust in the infant.

3.3.2 Autonomy versus shame (one to three years)

The toddler begins to realise that there is a separation between itself and others. The toddler also becomes aware of its ability to determine own behaviour, but remains dependent on the caregiver. However, the more the toddler can grow independently, the more autonomous the toddler will become. The foundation of this autonomy lies within the toddler's independent basic activities such as eating, movement and dressing. The virtue to be attained in this stage is that of possessing one's own will (Hook, 2009).

3.3.3 Initiative versus guilt (three to six years)

Hook (2009) states that this stage entails the exploration of the environment and social world through tasks that need to be mastered. Children at this stage are eager to explore, although not always within safe boundaries. They now have the ability to verbalise many experiences and question others according to their curiosity. The virtue achieved in this stage is purpose, and moral development also becomes a prominent factor during this phase. Guilt is not considered the opposite of initiative, and therefore the absence of guilt is not preferred. Instead, guilt guides initiative into safer choices, because the child is deciding to take initiative in many ways. Furthermore, the child is increasingly involved in social interactions. Hook (2009) states that cultural values and norms are now modelled onto children, including the expected gender roles.

3.3.4 Industry versus inferiority (six to 12 years)

This stage is primarily concerned with further physical, intellectual and social skills development. These task-orientated activities are determined through school-related expectations and family instruction (Hook, 2009). Hook (2009) suggests that this stage is also significant due to the child's identification with peers, which adds to identity development.

However, self-comparison with peers is also presented, and a child's low self-evaluation against their peers can have a long-lasting negative effect on the child, causing a feeling of inferiority (Hook, 2009). The child, after the resolution of this stage, will become industrious, which is the virtue assigned to this age range.

3.3.5 Identity versus role confusion (12 to 20 years)

This is a time of pubescent growth, and puberty contributes greatly to experiences during this stage of development (Hook, 2009). This is the first step of formalising an identity, which will assist the adolescent in developing into an adult. This stage is defined by the integration of the self with the world. Role confusion occurs when the adolescent is unable to develop a secure self-identity and rather conforms to a group identity. It is essential in this stage that the individual forms a balance between self-identity and societal roles. The expected virtue to be nurtured in this stage is fidelity (Hook, 2009).

3.3.6 Intimacy versus isolation (20 to 40 years)

Erikson (1980) has affirmed that only after a sense of identity has been developed can an individual progress towards the next stage of psychosocial development, which is intimacy versus distantiation (as initially termed by Erikson, before utilising the term isolation). This developmental phase towards intimacy involves creating healthy relationships between ourselves and others (Hook, 2009). Therefore, the resolution of this stage will result in the virtue of love (Hook, 2009). Hook (2009) also suggests that this stage is focused on creating a balance in a romantic relationship so as to maintain each person's identity within the relationship. This is to ensure that compromises made within the relationship do not cause or require individuals to lose their self-identity in the process. This process resonates with Bowen's theory (1976) regarding the individual's ability to differentiate between the emotional and intellectual systems while in a relationship, thus resulting in healthy relationships (see section on differentiation of self), as described in Bowen's (1976) Family Systems Theory.

The focus of the current research is not on the functioning of relationships in the participant's life. However, this stage of adulthood suggests that an individual should have a stable identity, allowing for healthy relationships. Moreover, the assumption is that, if what Erikson (1980) considers the capacity towards healthy relationships is present, the individual should be capable of self-reflection, which is possible through self-identification. It is this ability of self-reflection that is important and necessary in order to obtain a valid perspective on adoption from the

participants in this study, and thereby to achieve the aim of the current research. According to Sigelman and Shaffer (1995), participants who have an established identity and fall within the age prescribed in the sixth psychosocial stage of Erikson's theory should be capable of providing an opinion on their beliefs or values. However, this is then dependant on their current progress in personal identity formation.

3.3.7 Review of Psychosocial Theory

Erikson's theory has a positive regard for human beings, as it assumes that everyone has the ability to overcome each developmental stage (Erikson, 1980). However, there has been criticism against Erikson's Psychosocial Theory. There is a concern that Erikson's theory does not consider the effect of personality types in its developmental stages, which makes it difficult to apply his theory on an individual basis (Hook, 2009). Another critique is that there are generalised developmental expectations placed on all individuals, which ignores the impact of the cultural context (Newman & Newman, 2012).

However, Erikson states that he prefers his theory to be used as a framework for development and not as a finite developmental guideline (Erikson, 1980). Interestingly, Erikson even shared his concern that other professionals would use his theory as a societal norm against expected development, but he believed that his theory was just a description of the phases of psychosocial development (Hook, 2009). Considering that Adoption Adjustment Theory was adapted from Psychosocial Theory and developed specifically for adoption, it was viable to determine the possible relevance of Adoption Adjustment Theory. Therefore, this section (3.3.7) continues with a discussion of Adoption Adjustment Theory.

3.3.7.1 Adoption Adjustment Theory

Brodzinsky (1987) developed a model specifically for adoption, using Erikson's psychosocial stages of development. This model was developed in an attempt to determine the adjustment to adoption by adoptive parents and adoptees from a psychosocial perspective. Brodzinsky (1987) believes that adoption complicates the developmental path described by Erikson (1980), but his research was limited as he only focused on the first five stages of Erikson's theory. Brodzinsky's (1987) theory is, however, still relevant to the current research because it indicates whether adoptees are capable of progressing successfully through the developmental stages described by Erikson. This, in turn, will indicate whether adoptees, with the complications of an adoption identity (Fall et al., 2012), are able to achieve the developmental

stage that is expected from participants to be included in this current study, enabling them to provide a personal perspective on adoption.

Brodzinsky (1987) describes the following four developmental stages in adoptees:

3.3.7.1.1 Infancy (trust vs. mistrust)

Infancy, as described by Erikson (1980), is the need for the development of trust and is created by a connection between parents and baby. Apparently, this stage is affected differently within an adoptive family. According to Brodzinsky (1987), if emotions resulting from infertility are not dealt with by the parents, this may affect their caregiving capacity towards the adopted baby. Therefore, the parents' insufficient provision for a caring environment can affect the infant's sense of security, which affects the baby's ability to trust others. Additionally, adoptive parents rarely receive guidance about adoptive parenting, there is limited support for new adoptive parents due to social stigma, and the age of placement can affect the building of a secure parent-child relationship (Brodzinsky, 1987).

3.3.7.1.2 Toddler (autonomy vs. shame and doubt) and preschool period (initiative vs. guilt)

This stage, according to Erikson (1980), consists of the child developing independence from the parents. At this stage the parents experience a fear of separation as the child begins to develop independence through his/her need for autonomy and self-initiative (Brodzinsky, 1987). This is also a daunting and confusing experience for the child. However, the added difficulty in this stage of development in the case of adoption, as described by Brodzinsky (1987), is adoption disclosure. The adoptive parents' experience anxiety about the child's response to the disclosure of adoption.

3.3.7.1.3 Middle childhood / school-age years (industry vs. inferiority)

The next psychosocial development task is determined by a child's ability to master and understand various tasks, which is a pivotal stage for adopted children (Brodzinsky, 1987). The adoptees are not only focused on the tasks expected to be achieved for their age, but are also left with the additional task of understanding that they are adopted, and they have to master the meaning of their adoptive status. As adopted children's knowledge of their adoption grows, they may become confused about their type of family formation. This confusion leads to a process of adaptive grieving, which entails dealing with the loss of biological connections and adapting to this reality. This experience of loss can result in behavioural change related to grieving, and it needs to be acknowledged by the adoptive family (Brodzinsky, 1987).

3.3.7.1.4 Adolescence (ego identity vs. identity confusion)

Brodzinsky (1987) claims that adopted adolescents are at a disadvantage for identity formation within this stage, which is already wrought with identity difficulties. He believes that this is caused by the lack of genealogical information available to adoptees and the numerous unanswered questions surrounding their adoption. The ultimate resolution is the ability to discover their identity, while maintaining a sincere family connection with the adoptive family.

3.3.7.1.5 Discussion of Adoption Adjustment Theory

Brodzinsky developed an adaptation of Erikson's theory of psychosocial development, which highlighted adoption adjustment challenges within the adoptive family. A discussion of Brodzinsky's theory indicates additional tasks in psychosocial development necessary for the adoptee. Brodzinsky (1987) also discusses the added anxiety created by adoption regarding child development and parenthood within the adoptive family. He further explains the child's feelings of loss of his/her biological family, which manifest in grief and a necessity to deal with the loss. This is known as adaptive grieving, and may develop into problematic or dysfunctional behaviour.

Adoption Adjustment Theory indicates important aspects of adoption and emphasises the influences of psychosocial development, specifically for adoptees. However, Brodzinsky (1987) reports that his theory has not been validated empirically. More importantly, his research reveals that there is no significant variance from normative psychological developmental for the general population of adoptees (Brodzinsky, 1987). Moreover, Erikson, being an adoptee himself (Newman & Newman, 2012), developed his theory without specific reference to adoption challenges in psychosocial development. The Psychosocial Theory developed by Erikson, as described by Newman and Newman (2012), allows for the recognition of self-regulation and the contribution to one's own development in all life stages. This aspect is lacking in Brodzinsky's theory of adoption adjustment, where we are led to assume that adoption consistently results in the same developmental challenges in all adoptive families (Brodzinsky, 1987). Therefore, using Brodzinsky's theory (1987) may perpetuate the assumption that difficulties are expected in the development of all adoptees. This guided me to select Erikson's Psychosocial Theory as the preferred theoretical basis for this study, as it allowed me to understand the psychosocial stage of this study's research participants without preconceived ideas of the development of adoptees.

Ultimately, the application of Psychosocial Theory in the current study assisted in the conceptual understanding that individuals between the ages of 20 to 40 years (age applicable to the current research sample) should have developed a stable identity, irrespective of adoption status, which suggests a self-awareness of their beliefs and therefore, that they are capable of providing a personal perspective on adoption.

3.4 Applicability of developmental psychology theories in the South African context

Macleod (2009) states that some South African researchers utilise developmental-contextual perspectives to understand growth. This is congruent with the combination of a developmental psychosocial theory and the contextual Family Systems Theory, as discussed and presented in this chapter. However, historically, developmental psychology has assumed that there is an ideally typical nuclear family and that it is applicable to all cultures or geographic areas (Hook & Duncan, 2009). Moreover, it has been emphasised that society changes continuously and what is considered as a healthy family environment, regarding the care of children, has also changed over the centuries. Developmental psychology has also been criticised for historical racial profiling during apartheid in South Africa, contributing towards gender inequality, and creating expectations of motherhood (Hook & Duncan, 2009). Therefore, a developmental psychology approach may have an effect on adoption-related decisions such as the race of the adopted child, the expected development of the child and the necessity of raising children to conform to the societal norms of family life or motherhood.

3.5 Chapter conclusion

The theoretical framework is drawn together by the underlying concept of developmental psychology, as the main purpose of adoption is to provide a family environment to enhance the development of the child. A discussion of Bowen's (1976) Family Systems Theory was necessary, as it is considered relevant to family studies in adoption research. Family Systems Theory focuses on the formation of the nuclear family and provides a view of interactions within the nuclear family (Bowen, 1976). Therefore, I considered Bowen's Family Systems Theory relevant to adoption, as adoption is a pathway to nuclear family formation.

In addition, Psychosocial Development Theory and Adoption Adjustment Theory were compared to ensure that preference was not given to one theory, as both are relevant to adoption research. Psychosocial Theory has been questioned based on its assumptions of normal

development (Hook, 2009), whereas Adoption Adjustment Theory has attempted to create a better representation of adoption development (Brodzinsky, 1987). However, Adoption Adjustment Theory is not included in this study in order to prevent creating the impression that adoptees experience a definitive deviation from normal development. Furthermore, Brodzinsky (1987) confirms that the general population of adoptees has developed within the expected norms. Psychosocial Theory also does not discuss psychosocial development according to adoption status. Therefore, Psychosocial Theory is included because the current research aimed to explore the adult (adoptee) perspectives on a social phenomenon, namely adoption.

Based on the research aims, Psychosocial Theory and Family Systems Theory were selected to provide the theoretical framework in which the current research is grounded. The integration of these theories to understand the context of adoption is of key importance. This study's theoretical framework indicates what Family Systems Theory and Psychosocial Theory entail, thereby giving recognition to an individual's (adopted person) interaction and development within a family system. Bearing this in mind, interpretations of the complexities of perspectives on adoption by adult adoptees that are part of a family system should be undertaken with care and understanding. In the next chapter I discuss the research methodology, inclusive of explaining its relation to this theoretical framework.

Chapter 4

Methodology

4.1 Introduction

The theories discussed in the current study provide a conceptual framework for understanding the participants' developmental context, inclusive of their psychosocial stage and family influence. However, the aim of this study was to explore adult adoptees' adoption perspectives, which require participants to express themselves about the phenomenon of adoption. Therefore, the research question solicited perspectives on the topic of adoption and directed the methodology towards achieving this study's research objectives. Consequently, the research question for this study was: What are adult adoptees' perspectives on adoption?

When considering the research question of the current study, I applied a phenomenological approach, which involves investigating the meanings and perceptions that individuals attribute to their lived experiences (Ribbens McCarthy & Edwards, 2011). Therefore, I attempted to understand the phenomenon of adoption by focusing on the perspectives that the adult participants had developed on adoption from their lived experiences as adoptees. Gilgun (2009) mentions that qualitative research methods assist in the descriptive understanding of lived experiences, and they are applicable to a phenomenological approach (Starks & Trinidad, 2007). Therefore, to answer the research question it was necessary that a qualitative research method be utilised in this study. The qualitative research design and the research method are discussed further on in this chapter.

4.2 Research design

According to Shenton (2004), qualitative research is criticised and reluctantly accepted to be a trustworthy method of research. Therefore, measures to generate trustworthiness are discussed further on in this chapter. Another criticism of qualitative research is that it is subjective (Way, 2005). However, considering that adoption is a subjective experience, it is appropriate to use a qualitative method, which correlates with the purpose of obtaining a subjective perspective (Gilgun, 2009). Additionally, Gilgun (2009) claims that a qualitative research method emphasises a demand for subjective disclosure and, if this is expected from the participant, it requires the researcher to consciously connect with the participant. I therefore informed the participants that I am adopted, and my disclosure appeared to create a connection between me

and them, which was noticed in their openness when sharing their perspectives. However, it was of great importance that I remained self-aware of my personal experience and subjective perspectives to ensure academic integrity.

The selected phenomenological approach also guided the method of data analysis, as it required a thematic description of the lived experience under study (Starks & Trinidad, 2007). Therefore, discourse analysis was not utilised because it ignores the narratives and focuses on understanding the language presented in the participant's narrative (Starks & Trinidad, 2007). According to Vaismoradi, Turunen, and Bondas (2013), content analysis simplifies the data and therefore could not result in the detailed thematic description of perspectives I aimed to present. Consequently, thematic analysis was utilised in the current research because it provides a rich thematic presentation of all the perspectives shared. The analysis was achieved by creating themes with meaning, developed across all the participants' narratives (Alhojailan, 2012), instead of placing significance on the frequency of content or language usage within the narratives.

Furthermore, Way (2005) suggests that reflecting on the research process and content, considering the context of the participants, and being engaged with the idea of learning new perspectives are three channels permitting research vitality. Therefore, in the following section, on research method, I reflect on the research process as one channel to assist with indicating the research vitality of the current study.

4.3 Research method

4.3.1 Data collection methods

A biographical questionnaire and an interview schedule were utilised to fulfil the research objectives. A biographical questionnaire (see Appendix C) was developed to gather background information regarding the participants. The questionnaire consisted of two sections. Section A enquired about the general demographics of the participants, namely gender, age, marital status, race, educational level, current employment and whether they are parents. Section B asked adoption-related questions, namely how old they were at placement, whether they have adopted children themselves, at what age they started searching, who they searched for, whom they have met and how they were able to find their biological relative/s. The demographics obtained are discussed in more detail further on in this chapter.

According to Way (2005), the limitation of the researcher's preconceived beliefs and understanding will influence the strength of qualitative research methods, such as interviewing. However, it is feasible to conduct interviews when utilising a qualitative research method, because it is a flexible method that relies on self-insight by the participants (Newman & Newman, 2012). Semi-structured interviews allow the participants to express themselves regarding their personal perspectives (Gilgun, 2009). Additionally, this type of interview structure allows for less questioning of the participant and more flexibility in their responses. Therefore, a semi-structured individual interview was specifically selected as the method for qualitative data collection.

The primary interview question was derived directly from the research question. The open-ended interview question was: "What are your perspectives on adoption?" Moreover, the probing questions had a dual approach: What are the positives and negatives of adoption?" The dual probing was conducted to elicit non-biased responses and to prevent my adoption status from influencing the participants' responses.

4.3.2 Sampling

The selection of the research sample was not random, because it involved non-probabilistic purposive sampling on the basis of sampling criteria (Trochim, 2006). This section therefore indicates the sampling criteria and the reasons that substantiate the chosen criteria. I also discuss the sampling strategy applied to obtain the required participants, which includes the finalisation of the sample size based on data saturation.

I decided that the adoptees had to meet three criteria before being selected to participate in this study. Firstly, the participants had to be searching adoptees – people who were adopted as infants or children and were searching or had searched for biological information/biological relative(s). This was an indication that they were aware of their adoptive status and possibly would be more willing to engage in research on their perspectives on adoption (Scordilis, 2006). This decision – to use searching adoptees – was also based on policies and sensitivities around adoption. Furthermore, searching adoptees are the most accessible group within the adoption community (Wrobel, Grotevant, Samek, & Von Korff, 2013). I also avoided the infringement of adoption procedures, which may have occurred when attempting to contact non-searching adoptees (e.g. adoptees unaware of their adoption status).

Secondly, the age range of participants had to be between 20 and 40 years. Developmental psychology provides a strong theoretical framework for understanding adoption. Considering that Erikson is one of the most influential developmental psychologists and an adoptee himself, it is possible that his formulated developmental stages would be influenced by his adoption experience (Newman & Newman, 2012). As discussed in Chapter 2, the sixth psychosocial stage described by Erikson (1980) is relevant to this sample's age criteria. Erickson believes that, even though identity development is a fluid process, it should be reasonably established by 20 years of age (Sigelman & Shaffer, 1995). Therefore, by using the chosen sample age, I possibly obtained participants who were capable of reflective responses due to an established identity based on self-awareness (Sigelman & Shaffer, 1995). Thirdly, the adoptee participants were required to have valid contact details that enabled me to make contact with them.

I approached the adoption manager at Cape Town Child Welfare to request the organisation's assistance with identifying a sample for this study. I received a letter from Cape Town Child Welfare confirming that they would assist me in the recruitment of participants (see Appendix E). After I had received their confirmation to assist, I proceeded with the application for ethical research approval. Once ethical approval was obtained from the Research Ethics Committee (Humanities) (see Appendix F) at Stellenbosch University, an adoption administrator selected prospective participants from a list of searching adoptees who had contacted Cape Town Child Welfare in search of biological information. She then selected the participants according to the age criteria. I did not provide the administrator with further instructions regarding the order in which to select participants from the list of searching adoptees. The administrator made telephonic contact with the adoptees to inform them of the research, what would be expected from a participant, and to request participation. The adoptees who agreed to participate were sent a research information letter (see Appendix A) by email from the Cape Town Child Welfare administrator, and they were informed that she would provide me with their contact details.

During the data collection process I also interacted with individuals who knew of adopted people who met the research criteria. Further ethical approval was obtained from the Research Ethics Committee (Humanities) (see Appendix F) at Stellenbosch University to include a secondary sampling method, namely snowballing. Snowballing involved approaching individuals who are familiar with adoptees who agreed to act as an intermediary. The intermediary discussed the research with the adoptees and requested their possible participation in the study. Once the adoptees agreed to participate, the intermediary informed them that I

would be provided with their contact details. Once I received the contact details I sent the adoptees the research information letter (see Appendix A) by email.

I contacted the adoptees obtained from both sampling methods by email or by telephone a few days after sending them the research information letter so as to allow them an opportunity to read the letter. I again enquired whether they were still prepared to participate. If the adoptee was still interested in participating, we immediately scheduled an interview. However, there were two participants who had no email access and I therefore could not forward them the information letter. These participants indicated to the intermediary that they were comfortable with agreeing to participate verbally purely based on their interest in the research topic, irrespective of the option to receive the information letter by post. In those situations, after receiving their contact details I contacted them telephonically and proceeded to arrange an interview. Furthermore, the research information was discussed in full before the interview commenced and the participant was given another opportunity to decline participation. Voluntary participation was emphasised in both sampling approaches.

The final sample size was determined by data saturation – when no new information was introduced. Guest, Bunce, and Johnson (2006) demonstrated in a study that theme saturation may be obtained in as few as six interviews and data saturation in 12 interviews. After each interview had been conducted, I applied a bottom-up coding method, by which I attached codes to all the information provided during the interview. This ensured that data saturation would be valid, as no data was overlooked. Therefore, when no new codes were produced it was evident that data saturation had occurred. Although data saturation occurred after 10 interviews with a demographically diverse group, I did two more interviews and ended with a final sample size of 12 participants. The sample consisted of a racially diverse group of searching adoptees, aged between 20 and 39 years, and comprising seven females and five males. Further demographics of these participants are discussed in the next section.

4.3.3 Demographics of participants

In this subsection, demographics are provided to add context to the participants' responses, and to ensure the transferability and trustworthiness of this research study (Shenton, 2004). All the participants resided in the Western Cape province of South Africa, all were searching adoptees and all had closed adoptions (the adoptive family had no physical contact with the biological family). In addition, all were placed with their adoptive families between birth and eight

months of age, which the adoption literature terms as early placement. Closed adoption and age of placement were not specified in the current research criteria. However, they are briefly stated in this subsection, because these demographics are generally noted in adoption research.

The age range of the participants was from 20 to 39 years. Three participants were in their 20s and the rest were in their 30s. There were seven females and five males who participated. This is not necessarily an unbalanced gender ratio, as it has been stated by Townsend and Dawes (2004) that girls are more likely to be adopted than boys. The participants were racially diverse, as there were three black, five coloured (mixed race), two Indian and two white adoptees who participated in this study. They presented with a total of 11 same-race adoptions and one interracial adoption. Two of the adoptees interviewed were biologically related, as well as being twins. Siblings of the other adoptees could not participate because they did not meet the current study's research criteria. Three of the participants were the only child in their adoptive family.

With regard to educational level, seven adoptees had completed tertiary education, three were busy studying for a tertiary qualification, one was a high school graduate and one had not completed high school. Apart from the three full-time students, eight participants were employed at the time of data collection. Furthermore, four of the participants were married with children, four were single with no children (of which three were young students), one was a single adoptee with children, one was a widow with children, one was divorced with children, and one participant, who had a child from a previous relationship, was in a domestic partnership. None of the participants had adopted children, although half of them had personally considered adopting.

Adoption disclosure is an important aspect in the life of an adoptee. It indicates the variation in age at which disclosure to the adoptees of their being adopted occurs. Moreover, the method of adoption disclosure is also significant, as it affects the adoptee's view on adoption (Wydra et al., 2012). Most of the participants were told by their parents about their adoption status during their early primary school years. However, four adoptees were not told and discovered their adoption status by accident, between the ages of nine and 16 years.

The participants in this study began their search (for their biological parents) between the ages of 16 and 36 years. Only two participants had made contact with their biological relatives, two adoptees had only searched the internet, and two had decided against meeting their biological

relative/s after they initiated their search. Another three adoptees were in the process of searching, while three adoptees abandoned their search due to limited available information. A majority of the participants ($n = 8$) searched specifically for their biological mothers.

The current research sample therefore consisted of searching adoptees residing in the Western Cape province of South Africa, and comprised seven females and five males between 20 and 39 years of age. Ten of the participants had completed or were currently pursuing a tertiary qualification. The participants were racially diverse and 11 of them were adopted within their race. Lastly, all of the adoptees were placed with their adoptive families before they were eight months old, and three of the participants were abandoned at birth before being adopted.

4.3.4 Procedure

The participants were identified and contacted by the adoption administrator at Cape Town Child Welfare, or through an intermediary with whom they were familiar. The person by whom they were contacted explained the aim and objectives of the study to the adoptee, and enquired whether the adoptee was interested in participating in the present research. Adoptees who agreed to participate were sent an information letter (see Appendix A) by Cape Town Child Welfare, the intermediary individual or me. During a telephonic or email follow-up with the participants, I initially enquired whether they had read the information letter they received, and then asked if they were still interested in participating in this research. Once the adoptee voluntarily agreed to participate, an interview was scheduled according to their preferred date, time and venue.

I followed a specific procedure when I met with the participant for the interview. All the information regarding the study, such as the research aim, possible impact of the research and ethical conduct, were discussed. The participant was informed that a recording device would be used during the interview and that all data collected would be safely stored on a secure device in a locked storage facility for five years. The participants were also informed that they may withdraw at any point during the study without any negative consequences for them. Any other information required to obtain informed consent was explained by me to the participants and they had an opportunity to ask questions. The consent form (see Appendix B) was signed as confirmation of their agreement to participate in the study. The interview commenced only once the consent form had been signed.

To uphold anonymity a pseudonym was chosen by the participant, after which the participant completed the biographical questionnaire. This was followed by the semi-structured interview, which I recorded with an audio-recording device. I began the interview with an open-ended question: “What are your perspectives on adoption?” and probing questions were asked if the participant needed assistance or encouragement to provide more detailed responses (see Appendix D). The average time period of the interviews ranged between 30 and 60 minutes. All of the interviews were conducted in English, even though other language options were offered to the participants. After the interview, the adoptee was thanked for participating in the study. Furthermore, confidentiality was maintained by refraining from using identifiable information in the presentation of the results or any other written part of the current research study.

The interview recordings were transferred onto an external hard drive and transcribed by me. The hard drive and all other data were then stored in a code-protected safe in my home and only I have access to the safe.

4.3.5 Ethical considerations

Ethical clearance for this study was obtained from the Research Ethics Committee (Humanities) (see Appendix F) at Stellenbosch University (protocol number: SU-HSD-001350). My ethical conduct following ethical approval was monitored by my research supervisor, as well as by the adoption manager at Cape Town Child Welfare. Ethical approval had officially been obtained before sampling and data collection were initiated.

To adhere to ethical principles, as indicated by Newman and Newman (2012), I focused on five specific aspects. First, anonymity was ensured. Each participant chose a pseudonym prior to the interview and all results are reported according to the pseudonyms provided. This was done to protect their right to privacy. Second, confidentiality was upheld because no identifiable information relating to the participants is reported in this research and all data obtained is stored securely in a locked storage unit. This ensures that nobody can link the data obtained to a participant or identify any individual in the study.

The third aspect is informed consent; in this regard the participants received a research information letter that explained all the components of the research (see Appendix A). The letter contained information regarding the research aims, objectives and procedure, the

potential risk or benefits of participating in this research, and the ethical considerations. This gave them further opportunity to decide on their participation, following their initial verbal participation agreement with the Cape Town Child Welfare adoption administrator or the intermediary. The information on the research was discussed prior to the interview, and finally a consent form was signed as confirmation that the participants understood the research and their rights. These forms contained the same information as the informational letter, which was available in English and Afrikaans (see Appendix B).

Fourth, with regard to participant withdrawal, the participants were informed of their right to withdraw from the research through two pathways. They were sent an information letter, and were told verbally prior to the interview when I read from the consent form before they signed it. The participants were further informed that they may withdraw from the research at any time before this study is submitted.

The fifth aspect was the availability of counselling services, which were offered to all the participants in the event of any discomfort caused by the discussion of adoption. They were also informed of the availability of counselling prior to the interview. Although this aspect is not discussed in Newman and Newman (2012), it was offered as a precautionary measure to uphold all the ethical considerations linked to their research participation. The two available counsellors have professional backgrounds in adoption services. Their contact information was stipulated in detail on the consent form (see Appendix B) and the counselling had been made available at no cost to the participants or the researcher.

4.3.6 Data analysis

Thematic analysis was utilised to analyse the data collected during the interviews. Braun and Clarke (2006) state that the method of thematic analysis is a flexible research technique that is not attached to a specific theoretical framework. However, Way (2005) states that theory and the participants' biographical information, which are presented in the current research study (see Chapter 3 and section 4.3.3), may be utilised to add context to the research data. Braun and Clarke (2006) describe a method of thematic analysis to identify, analyse and report themes based on the research data. I applied this method to provide a detailed description of the themes from the entire dataset of the participants' perspectives on adoption. This generated the opportunity for reflecting on the validity of the themes created – by providing a holistic

thematic map. This method can be useful when there is a lack of available research done on a particular specified sample (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

A computer software program compatible with thematic analysis, known as ATLAS.ti 7 (2015), also was utilised in the analysis. This program assisted me in organising codes and themes that emerged from the transcribed interviews. The results were arranged in diagrams, also termed thematic maps. These thematic maps assisted in the reporting of the research findings. I applied the following six phases to perform thematic analysis, as described by Braun and Clarke (2006):

4.3.6.1 Familiarisation

My familiarisation with the data was initiated through personally conducting the research interviews. This enabled me to become immersed in the data as it was presented, and it influenced my analysis of the data. Additional familiarisation occurred when I transcribed the data, which I followed with active and repetitive reading of the entire transcribed dataset.

4.3.6.2 Generating codes

This is an explorative study and the analysis consisted of an inductive process, consisting of the development of codes as identified directly from the research interviews (data). In this inductive approach I refrained from including pre-existing theory in the coding of the participants' responses (Braun & Clarke, 2006). The coding was therefore data driven because I generated the initial codes by noting elements in the dataset. These elements were the basic foundation of further analyses and I organised the developed codes using ATLAS.ti 7 (2015).

4.3.6.3 Searching for themes

In this phase I evaluated the codes and organised them into themes. Diagrams developed with the ATLAS.ti 7 (2015) software were utilised to create a visual idea of possible themes. The extracts from the data used to develop the codes were attached to the themes identified. This further assisted me in identifying similarities or differences within each theme in the dataset.

4.3.6.4 Reviewing themes

Reviewing the themes occurred on two levels, which started at the beginning of the coding process. First, I reviewed the codes and data extracts to determine whether the patterns were still coherent with the themes they were initially associated with. A preliminary thematic map was developed. Second, I refined the themes, which consisted of comparing each theme in

relation to the entire dataset. This was done while I bore the research question in mind. This ensured that no themes previously unnoticed were lost. The reviewing process led to generating a refined thematic map, which provided a detailed visual image of the data.

4.3.6.5 Defining and naming themes

In this phase I developed semantic themes, which involved the description, organisation and summarisation of the data. This was relevant, as I intended to highlight the adult adoptees' personal perspectives instead of analysing the interviews in search of underlying meanings. I defined the individual themes through explaining the meaning of each theme. At this stage I noticed the multi-levelled nature of the themes and therefore separated them into meta-themes, themes and subthemes. Meta-themes were further refined by considering each one individually in its complexity by including its themes and subthemes. Furthermore, I evaluated the meaning of each meta-theme in relation to the other meta-themes presented.

4.3.6.6 Producing the report

The report is my written analysis of the research data, which attempts to connect the analysed data with the research question. The research question was explorative and themes needed to be identified. However, it is of essence that the pathway to expressing the information in the report has relevance and is not merely a description of the data obtained (Braun & Clarke, 2006). I assigned meaning to the results through the frequency with which a theme was discussed by all the participants, and its link to the relevant literature and to theory. Therefore, the results that I report in the next chapter were utilised to draw research conclusions by adding meaning to the identified data patterns.

4.4 Procedures to ensure trustworthiness

I elaborate below on which strategies I implemented to ensure trustworthy research. I applied strategies developed by Shenton (2004) to ensure that the research conducted would be considered trustworthy. Shenton (2004) emphasises four criteria, namely credibility, transferability, dependability and confirmability, which need to be met by applying these strategies. In each of these criteria I discuss specific strategies that I implemented during the current research study.

4.4.1 Credibility

The ability to demonstrate that the findings presented are a real depiction of the phenomenon investigated shows the credibility of the research (Shenton, 2004). Various techniques were applied in this research study to improve its credibility.

4.4.1.1 Adoption of research method

The decision on the research method to be followed was based specifically on the research question and the information I wanted to elicit from the participants. The method followed in this study was also applied in various previous studies. In my research design I explain why qualitative research is applicable to the current research objectives by using previous research perspectives, such as those of Gilgun (2009). Thematic analysis, as described by Braun and Clarke (2006), is not attached to a theoretical framework, which allowed the data analysis to be data driven instead of theory driven. In addition, Guest et al. (2006) determined sample size through data saturation for a study utilising thematic analysis, and their finding on sample size was considered in this study's sample size.

4.4.1.2 Ensuring participant honesty

Honesty by the participants is of value for the data to be valid. Voluntary participation was requested to promote honesty in the responses. The participants were also assured complete anonymity and confidentiality, which included the use of a pseudonym when reporting the results. They also were informed that they may withdraw from the research at any time, and they were informed of my request for their true response, without judgment. I also initiated honesty by the adoptees by revealing my adoption status and informing them that I would sincerely attempt to remain objective.

4.4.1.3 Debriefing sessions

Regular meetings occurred between my supervisor and me. These meetings enabled me to find guidance in relation to current thinking patterns and provided me with a more objective view of the direction, or possible bias, in the current research.

4.4.1.4 Researcher's reflective commentary

It is important to continuously evaluate the research analysis (Shenton, 2004). I therefore consistently recorded my reflections on the data analysis process and thinking patterns that

developed. My reflective commentary informed my decisions in the development of the meta-themes and the discussion of my research results.

4.4.1.5 Examination of previous research findings

I discussed other research findings related to my topic in the literature review chapter, which enabled me to relate my findings to existing knowledge on the phenomenon of adoption. These previous research findings are also compared to my research results in the next chapter (see Results and Discussion).

4.4.2 Transferability

It is important to make sufficient contextual information available to allow other researchers to decide on the transferability of the current research findings (Shenton, 2004). Therefore, in this chapter I have reported on the contextual factors, such as sampling criteria (e.g. geographical area, age, searching adoptees), the procedure followed and the participant demographics. Moreover, the limitations of this research study are discussed in the conclusion chapter. All these details create an opportunity for others to decide on the possibility of the transferability of the current research findings to other research settings.

4.4.3 Dependability

Dependability ensures that research conducted under the exact circumstances will render similar results (Shenton, 2004). In this chapter I have motivated my selection of the research design, and the research method has been described in detail, which permits the research to be replicated. Therefore, sampling, measures, procedure, participant demographics and data analysis are provided in this chapter to ensure that sufficient information is made available for future research projects.

4.4.4 Confirmability

The purpose of confirmability is to actively strive for objectivity and to reduce the effects of researcher bias (Shenton, 2004). In this research study, confirmability was approached through my detailed discussion of the research methodology in this chapter, which enables the research results to be scrutinised by others. Confirmability was also accomplished by using a data audit trail. The current research study's audit trail is the detailed explanation, provided in this chapter, of the process involved in obtaining and analysing the data. This further entailed me highlighting the pathway of information in the results that led to the conclusions on the research.

Moreover, the procedure described is inclusive of the shortfalls of the method, which are discussed in the conclusion of this thesis.

4.5 Chapter conclusion

The current study's research question guided me in determining the appropriate research methodology, which resulted in the selection of a phenomenological approach. I therefore conducted this study using a qualitative research method, as it is applicable to the approach mentioned above, and it assisted me in addressing the research question. Through qualitative research I also could elicit subjective and detailed perspectives on adoption. However, I had to address concerns of trustworthiness in my qualitative research process. I used specific strategies to meet the four necessary criteria in achieving trustworthy research, namely 1) credibility, 2) transferability, 3) dependability and 4) confirmability.

Ethics approval for the current research study was obtained prior to sampling. The participants were identified according to the research criteria, and therefore not sampled randomly. The sample was purposely non-probabilistic because it is difficult to obtain adoptee participants randomly. It is evident that the sample was not representative of the total South African adopted population due to the inclusion criteria, and specifically because only searching adoptees participated in this study. However, the findings may be representative of the adopted population to a certain extent, because they provide the perspectives of non-clinical and non-judicial adult adoptees. Moreover, clinical and judicial samples are considered to possibly give rise to greater adoption bias in society due to their problematic orientations (Kowal & Schilling, 1985). The adult adoptees were contacted through Cape Town Child Welfare from their available records, and I also made use of snowball sampling. All the participants voluntarily agreed to participate.

During the interviews the participants completed a biographical questionnaire, and this information assisted in providing some context to the adoptees' perspectives. The demographics also added to my understanding of the data and improved the transferability of this research. Furthermore, semi-structured interviews were conducted with the participants and I initiated the interviews with an open-ended question. The open-ended interview question was developed directly from the research question and, by so doing, the participants shared perspectives relevant to the research question, aims and objectives. To ensure that the

participants and their rights were protected, I adhered to specific ethical guidelines, namely confidentiality, anonymity, informed consent and the option of participant withdrawal.

Thematic analysis, as described by Braun and Clarke (2006), was used to analyse the data because it is an applicable method for developing complex and descriptive themes from the adoption perspectives. The ATLAS.ti 7 (2015) software program is compliant with thematic analysis and was an organisational tool used to code the data from the transcribed interviews. Data saturation resulted in a final sample size of 12 racially diverse adoptees. After data saturation was reached, the refined thematic map created using thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006) and ATLAS.ti 7 (2015) provided an effective visual depiction of the data, which assisted me in interpreting the results.

In conclusion, the detailed planning, motivation and description of the research execution enabled me to report on results that indeed succeeded in answering the research question.

Chapter 5

Results and Discussion

5.1 Introduction

The adult adoptees' perspectives on adoption are the focus of the current research. Therefore, the research question was: What are adult adoptees' perspectives on adoption? As stated previously, a perspective is defined by Macmillan (1996, p. 716) as a "particular way of thinking about something, especially when influenced by personal experience or circumstances".

The primary interview question was: *What are your perspectives on adoption?* Considering that adoption is just a word that can be defined by the participants in a single response to the interview question, it was important to highlight that adoption is attached to the lived experiences of the adoptees. Therefore, their perspectives are inclusive of factors that add meaning to adoption. Some participants chose to provide their definition of the concept of adoption, while others indicated the value or challenges of adoption. Most of the participants shared a generous number of narratives, while probing questions were used to clarify aspects of the information shared. Some of the participants were so specific in their perspectives that their interviews would have been extremely short. In the case of such interviews, probing questions, as indicated in the interview schedule (see Appendix D), and questions related to their demographics, were used to assist in extracting more detail on their perspectives. For example, if a participant had siblings, they would be asked how adoption was experienced when siblings are present.

Moreover, the theoretical framework discussed in Chapter 3 provided insight for me as the researcher into the participants' responses regarding their psychosocial development and the family's influence in relation to adoption. In Chapter 4 I discussed the demographics of the participants (see section 4.3.3), which provides context to the participants' narratives. In addition, all the data was coded according to the transcribed interviews to ensure that the research question was addressed. Based on the participants' perspectives on adoption, four meta-themes evolved, namely 1) optimistic adoption views, beliefs and values [see section 5.2], 2) the integral role of the adoptive family in adoption [see section 5.3], 3) The impact of adoption [see section 5.4] and 4) Perceptions of adoption in society [see section 5.5].

The meta-themes were developed according to an overall connection that I noticed between certain themes, and these themes are patterns of meaning identified within the data. Therefore, the themes were determined by the importance that participants placed on certain adoption perspectives and were selected according to the number of participants who discussed a specific perspective on adoption. Moreover, some themes include subthemes, which provided a structure within the complex themes. Similarities and differences in perspectives were also considered in each theme, and the topic in itself guided its relevance, irrespective of it being a positive or negative perspective on adoption.

Consequently, since the foundation for determining the meta-themes, themes and subthemes has been clarified, I continue this chapter by reporting and discussing the results, and this is followed by a summary of the findings, and then a conclusion of this chapter. Please note that I will use my name, Cherith, where I quote myself in an interview with a participant. Also, the perspectives provided in this chapter will be reported according to pseudonyms utilised to protect the identity of the participants.

5.2 Optimistic adoption views, beliefs and values

This first meta-theme was developed from an overall adoption perspective provided by each of the participants and gives a basic understanding of their views on, beliefs about and values of adoption. This meta-theme is best described by a quote from one participant regarding his perspective on adoption. Dartagnon expressed his view that adoption is positive and that his view was influenced by a positive adoption experience. He placed value on openness about adoption. Dartagnon's view is also an indication of the complexity of the adoption perspectives shared.

***Dartagnon:** I guess my overall opinion of adoption is a, it's a positive one. Uhm, that been said, I think it's because my journey with adoption has always been a very positive and open and family-orientated one. So, to elaborate on what I mean by that, uhm, my parents have never hid the fact from me that I was adopted.*

The majority of the participants had a positive perspective on adoption and indicated that adoption provides opportunities for the adoptee, such as education. They considered adoption as a gift of life, family and love. Most of the participants experienced a sense of belonging, and therefore believe it is possible through adoption. They also stated that adoption does not provide a guarantee of a perfect life, but it provides an opportunity for a normal life. The

participants also believe that interracial adoptions will have a positive impact on society's racial divide. However, with interracial and cross-cultural adoptions, the adoptive parents need to be educated about the child's heritage. Lastly, adoption needs to be handled with sensitivity, because feelings of unworthiness may arise.

When the participants were asked about their perspectives on or understanding of adoption, they responded with the following views, beliefs and values:

Natasha: *It's parents giving their responsibilities to other parents.*

Tammy: *It's just giving up a child to another family who can't, who has uhm, who doesn't have the possibility of getting their own child, and doing what's best for your child.*

Luda: *Adoption to me is just the fact that uhm, there are kids out there that don't necessarily have parents or whatever, yes, and uhm, it would be for people, or it could be kids that were abused, or kids that have been ill-treated, or whatever, and it's a chance for them to have a better home.*

The participants' opinions reflect that adoption is a process of relinquishment, which is congruent with the societal understanding and purpose of adoption. Similarly, according to adoption research, adoption is the placement of children without adequate family care into permanent (adoptive) family environments that allow for the development of the child and involves the termination of the rights of the biological parents. Moreover, in the following quotes it appears that, apart from their basic understanding (view) of adoption, the participants also shared their personal beliefs and values attached to adoption.

Joelie: *My perspective of it is that I don't actually have a perspective of it, because it's my way of life. I describe it as my way of life. It's what I have known, it's part of my identity. My perspective of it is that I'm all for it, because it's what I have known to be part of myself and I have accepted it as a part of myself. So, I'm all for the, I have a positive feeling about adoption.*

Lance: *But my perspective of, of, of, of adoption is, I say, if people can afford to adopt, they should.*

Sadie: *Uhm, okay for me I think adoption is incredibly positive and I am a huge fan of adoption. I think it's great, I think.*

Zintle: *Well, there're many. Being a black South African I have completely different perspectives than most black South Africans that I have encountered. Uhm, many of my friends who are, who are black, they say no, "they will never adopt because it's a cultural thing and we need somebody within our culture". And yes, I understand and respect that, but there are so many babies who need homes and I was one of those babies. So, I, I understand and respect their point of view, but I don't agree with it at all.*

Namane: *Uh hum (affirmative) I don't think adoption, I don't think adoption like, should be abolished. Or how can I put it? Is not right. Adoption is good but... I think it is a good thing, but, if it's done in a proper way.*

Laura: *Ah, maybe adoption is a good thing to those who doesn't have kids, like my mother.*

Another participant was able to express her childhood and adult views of adoption by reflecting on her different life phases. Her reflection indicated an awareness of the difference between a childhood perspective and an adult perspective.

Joi: *As a child, adoption didn't mean much to me. Uhm, it actually didn't mean anything to me, because the people who adopted me were my parents and that is the bottom line of how I felt. There was no understanding of questioning their love, or questioning their motives, or anything. It was just, these are my parents, uhm, so I'm adopted. It was just a word. It wasn't anything that had an emotional attachment.*

Joi: *As an adult, uhm, before I had my own kids, adoption had more emotional attachment to it. Brought along lines of why was I adopted? Uhm, was there something wrong? Uhm. Adoption was, it felt, at some point it felt like something that's done, because my biological mother was maybe ashamed, or uhm, feelings of unworthiness.*

Joi: *Uhm and then as a mother myself, my perspective of adoption is, uhm, the most beautiful and unselfish act that an adult can do.*

A few participants compared adoptive parents to biological parents when attempting to explain the value they placed on adoption, and said they believed that adoptive parents were more involved with their children than some biological parents.

***Napoleon:** For me personally, adoption, uhm, can be better than a woman giving physical birth to a child man, ..., it can be man. Because sometimes some biological parents is..., far worse than a, a, a, or yes man, they can't even look after their own children man. I know, I've seen this man.*

Now that the meta-theme of optimistic adoption views, beliefs and values has been established, it is possible to continue to the eight themes that form the foundation of this meta-theme. The themes are: 1) positivity expressed about adoption, 2) adoption is a gift of life, family and love, 3) adoption is a preferred option in alternative childcare, 4) sense of belonging, 5) normal, 6) interracial and cross-cultural adoptions are positive, 7) opportunities and 8) no guarantees, which are reported further on [see sections 5.2.1 to 5.2.8]. This is followed by a conclusion on the results of this meta-theme.

5.2.1 Positivity expressed about adoption

Positivity was expressed by almost all the participants (n = 11; 91%). This theme evolved from the positive perspectives on adoption shared by the participants. The participants' positivity towards adoption was reflected in statements such as that adoption is good and positive. The participants' positive attitudes were revealed through their thinking patterns and feelings about themselves, others and adoption. Additionally, they included the value they attributed to themselves, others and adoption.

***Joelie:** So, I'm all for the, I have a positive feeling about adoption and I'm very, uhm, I have a very positive outlook and very optimistic about when adoption comes into a conversation, because I have first-hand experience about what it is.*

***Zintle:** Uhm. There must be thousands of reasons why it's a negative, but I really can't see them. I just think that if you go about it the right way, it can be a very positive experience.*

The positivity expressed about adoption was present in most of the interviews and was evident in the choice of words used when discussing adoption, for example feeling optimistic when talking about adoption.

5.2.2 Adoption is a gift of life, family and love

This theme was identified based on the majority of the participants (n = 10; 83%), who considered adoption as a gift of family, of a quality life, and of the opportunity to be loved. They verbalised this aspect as follows:

***Dartagnon:** Now I've realized it's not a sacrifice, because it was a gift you know. That's how I feel.*

***Joelie:** So, it's a very, I always had a very positive outlook and a positive perspective of adoption, because I, I believe that it's a positive thing. Because you giving someone life, you giving a child a life. Where it could have gone any way.*

***Luda:** So, I think the fact was that if you are in a family you have that whole, uhm, you feel like you not a leper. So, you've got that love, you've got that nurturing, you've got that role models, you've got that, uhm, desire to want to be something and have direction in your life, almost, because it's that whole family surrounding. So, I think with that comes a lot of things. Uh, it could be mind-sets, religion, uh, just the whole experience of being in a family.*

These participants all reflected on many areas in which adoption was a beneficial experience and believed that adoptees were the recipients of the gifts that come from being adopted.

5.2.3 Adoption is a preferred option in alternative childcare

The third theme, with three subthemes, was defined when many of the participants (n = 9; 75%) indicated the value they place on adoption against other childcare alternatives. The comparisons assisted the participants in validating their opinions on the value of adoption. The subthemes that were revealed in the data are 1) institutional care, 2) foster care and 3) child abandonment. The majority of the participants preferred adoption to alternative childcare options, because adoption provides stability, security, normality and a family life for an adoptable child.

***Joelie:** Basically, gifting a family with a kid that that family couldn't have and you giving that child a life, where you could have taken that child's life away when you found out that you were pregnant and that's also like, abortion and adoption basically walk hand in hand because, that's the two decisions a mother is faced with. And basically, I think, between those two and including adoption, not as, I am taking it as*

a positive, I'm taking it as a positive to abortion, which is a different route. Adoption is a positive in itself because you, the biological mother, you providing that child a life that you can't provide that child. You made that decision by not taking that child's life by giving that child life. So, I think adoption in a whole is a positive.

5.2.3.1 Institutional care

Half (n = 6; 50%) of the participants emphasised their view on adoption by comparing it to institutional care/orphanages. The participants that commented on this theme believe that adoption provides an experience of family life and normality, which is lacking in institutional care.

Joi: *Uhm, just having the support like any other normal child would have, as opposed to not being adopted and being placed in an orphanage, where opportunities are a lot less.*

Sadie: *But I think if you put children into what I would call an institution, it's like herding cats. You basically just trying to get them fed, washed and you know. And people who run those kinds of homes are working so hard for so little that they basically just trying to keep the kids alive and well. You're like well, yes, that's great, because you meeting their basic needs, but if you look at that hierarchy, Maslow's hierarchy, you are basically looking at the bottom.*

Additional insight was given by one participant who shared a personal relationship with children from an orphanage, which he believes directly exposed him to the differences between adoption and institutional care. His view is important, because he was able to compare these two options of alternative care in his own life.

Lance: *But I think adoption is still way better than growing up in an orphanage, cause my mom worked for Woolworths and I think that was her way of giving back. She took on that role of uh, ... orphanage in Belgravia, whereas, uhm, school holidays we always had two boys who use to come stay there with us during the school holidays and we grew up together also, uhm, and they had a tough love, life. I mean you can see sometimes, uhm, when your, your adoptive parents is proud of you and they yearn for that man.*

One of the participants disagreed and believed that any other choice of care except adoption would have been preferred by him, based on his adoptive family environment.

***Namane:** I think it, yes, Orphanage, I think it's. I think orphanage would have been better for us or abortion for that matter. Because, sorry, I'm sorry to say this, but uhm, I, I still feel that that's what my mother should've done for us, because in the family we were abused. I would say we were abused.*

In this subtheme, five of the six participants indicated that adoption is more beneficial than institutional care. However, the one participant who would have preferred institutional care indicated that it was based on the fact that he was abused in his adoptive family home.

5.2.3.2 Foster care

This subtheme consists of a comparison made by a few of the participants ($n = 4$; 33%) between foster care and adoption. Some believed that foster care had similar value for a child as adoption, but the similarity was not enough for the participants to favour foster care. Those participants believed that foster care cannot provide a child with a sense of belonging and meet all their developmental needs. However, one participant believed that adoption is the better care alternative.

***Sadie:** I think that the adoption versus the fostering goes back to the child and the hierarchy. And I think it creates a feeling of belonging and ownership. So, I think for a foster child, I think you would always have this sick feeling at the back of your mind that at any time you could be taken away from this family, for whatever reason. Whereas, I think adoption, I am who I am, I have the same surname as my parents. I am their child regardless of what happens, nobody can say any other way.*

***Tammy:** I think both is actually something good, because like in both the foster care and with adoption you are placed with people who cares for you and who loves you. So, either one would, but like with the adoption you are placed with, in a home, like you are placed with a family. Where in foster care you like have so many people around you, so there's not that individual care for you and you're like just a lot on top of each other, so. There's not that individual care and love that you get from a home.*

There was only one participant who shared a preference for foster or kinship care. However, her views were based on the fact that she would prefer that biological parents do not relinquish their child completely, so as to maintain a parental role in their child's life. In this instance, the participant's preference for kinship or foster care stems from her personal view that a biological family connection is important to her and that biological parents have a responsibility towards their children.

Natasha: I wouldn't do it (give her child up for adoption), I would find ways around it or I would, if I couldn't care for the child, I would give it to a relative where I still have that, that, that, that, an eye. And I could still explain certain things to her if she was going through something. Or I could say to her, you know what, your aunt or your uncle also had that, so rather use this. And that helped in our family, or this is in our family, so please be careful. Have that checked out. That is what I would want to do for my child. You know. You protecting them by giving them away, because you can't take care of them, but be involved then, somehow. Foster them then, but just be involved. Have some type of impact on the child, because the child needs you.

Natasha's view corresponds with previous research by Inhorn (2006) (see this study's literature review). According to Inhorn (2006), Muslim religious law is not prejudiced towards adoption, but parents are morally expected to care for their biological children. However, the majority of the participants who discussed this subtheme preferred adoption to foster care. Moreover, from the child adoptees' perspectives, any foster care placement before adoption should be as short as possible (Michail, 2013), which may reflect that adopted children also prefer adoption to foster care.

5.2.3.3 Child abandonment

Adoption is considered to involve abandonment issues for some adoptees. Abandonment is mentioned in different ways, including being abandoned before being adopted, or just having feelings of abandonment. However, this subtheme involves the act of abandonment (biological parents who abandon their children, instead of completing a process of relinquishment for adoption). Three of the participants (25%) discussed the act of child abandonment, but only one participant considered adoption somewhat similar to child abandonment, because adoption involves relinquishing a child. The other two participants were actually abandoned before being adopted and believed that adoption is better than being abandoned with no biological information.

In the following quote, Natasha considers adoption as being equal to abandoning your child.

***Natasha:** And then give away and there we go. It's the same like abandoning your child. It's the same like a mother leaving the child at the clinic or in the bin or whatever. You don't know who's going to get that child.*

Although Natasha's view is very specific, she continues by saying that the actual act of abandonment is worse.

***Natasha:** Each to its own. If they feel they can't handle a child, I also say today, why put the child in a bin, give it to somebody. Say I cannot handle this responsibility. Can you please help me?*

The biggest effect of abandonment was emphasised by the participants who were abandoned without any proper documents or familial information. Considering that Blackie (2014) mentions that abandonment has increased in South Africa, the following personal perspective on their lived experience is important.

***Zintle:** I personally think that I would have loved to know, have known those things, but because my, uhm, my biological mother, she didn't, uh, disclose any of that information, I don't know any of that and that's something that's really an uncomfortable feeling, uhm, but it's something that I've had to deal with.*

***Zintle:** So, growing up not knowing who my parents are, not knowing why I was, uhm, abandoned, not knowing any of those circumstances, it's horrible, but it is something that I had to deal with.*

Although Natasha initially considered adoption as similar to abandonment, all three participants stated that being placed for adoption is the preferred option to being abandoned. Therefore, based on the discussion of this theme regarding adoption as a childcare alternative, the majority of the participants who compared the different childcare alternatives recommended adoption as their preferred choice of alternative childcare.

The fourth theme of this meta-theme is reported and discussed in the next section

5.2.4 Sense of belonging

Two thirds of the participants (n = 8; 66%) linked adoption to a sense of belonging. Most of these participants expressed the opinion that adoption provides a sense of belonging to something of value in life, which is being a part of a family. However, two of the participants believed that they had not experience a sense of belonging. One participant stated that he did not feel as if he belonged because he experienced negative interactions within the adoptive family, and another participant said that she had no reason for feeling as if she did not belong in her adoptive family, because they treated her well.

Zintle: *Just so that you know that you are a part of something makes a person feel a whole lot better. Because I, there was a time in my life when I felt very alone, but I knew that I could turn to my mom and my aunty, who's my godmother, and uhm, I just knew that I had somebody. So, if I don't have someone, I'm more likely to go down a wrong path. Uhm, then if I have somebody who can just, I can talk to and vent and, and stuff like that. So, uhm, definitely that that is a pro ...*

Luda: *So, I think for a lot of people also, it's just, I don't get it. So, with me, personally, I always felt like I belonged to my family, man. And I suppose for a lot of people, they don't feel that belonging.*

There were different opinions among the participants for the reasons that adoptees do not feel a sense of belonging within their adoptive families, such as a lack of love or being treated poorly within the adoptive family. Luda and Natasha had different views when explaining the lack of a sense of belonging within the adoptive family. Luda stated he thought it might have been caused by the adoptive family's lack of affection, but Natasha stated that her family did not lack in their care for her. This is an indication of the heterogeneous nature of the adoptees' experience of belonging to their adoptive families. The different opinions are revealed in the next three statements.

Luda: *Uhm, and I can't understand why others don't feel that same way. Because as a kid, you always love uh, so purely, man. And I can't understand how uhm, like some kids don't get that feeling of belonging. So uhm, the only thing I can think is, that potentially, that love isn't being returned and that's maybe why they feel that they don't belong.*

***Namane:** We were treated like we don't belong, we could feel, we were made sure that we feel the pain that "You do not belong here".*

***Natasha:** And my personal experience was that I always felt like I didn't belong, and not because they made me feel that way.*

When a sense of belonging lacked within the adoptive family it had a negative influence on the behaviour of one of the participants.

***Namane:** You know, you are carrying this burden, " I do not belong here", you start drinking, you start, you know, being a dropout.*

Another participant felt that belonging could be addressed in adoption by providing an adoptee with a photograph of a biological relative.

***Joelie:** It helped. It helped. Because when I saw it, wow this is actually someone that resembles me. There's someone out there. I'm not alone in the world. I've always been. I would always think of I was adopted and then you think you are alone in the world. People think that you alone in the world and you have to fend for yourself. But when you think about it, that there is actually someone that does look like me and you not actually alone in the world. There's actually someone that does resemble me. ... Made me, when I saw the photo. Made me feel a part of something. For a really long time I didn't feel a part of anything. I felt a part of my family. I felt loved and everything, but I knew that I wasn't a part of them initially. That I was always part of something, and now there's the something that I was, that I am a part of. That I'm a piece of, not a part of. I'm a piece of something.*

Previous research that is relevant to this theme is that conducted by Miiller et al. (2002), who focused on the psychological functioning of searching adoptees in adulthood. They found that good psychological functioning occurred when secure attachment was present within the adoptive family, which created high life satisfaction. The adoption experience was also positive when a sense of belonging was established. This is similar to the difficulty expressed by Namane, as his adoption experience was negative and he lacked a sense of belonging in his adoptive family. It appears that Namane's lack of belonging contributed to his low life satisfaction, as indicated by his report of his resulting negative behaviour patterns (e.g.

drinking). Therefore, a sense of belonging is important in adoption. The majority of the participants who discussed this theme experienced belonging within their adoptive families.

5.2.5 A normal life

This theme was initially coded *Invivo*, because more than half of the participants ($n = 7$; 58%) consistently expressed their opinion by using the word “normal”. It represents the moments that the adoptees believed themselves to be “normal” and that they were considered normal or well-adjusted by others. It also highlights the participants’ views of adoption as normal, being a normal experience, and a pathway to developing normal individuals. One participant added context by suggesting that open communication in adoption and friendships with other adoptees were the reasons why she considered adoption as normal.

Sadie: They go “Oh, but you are so well adjusted and normal” and you go “Yes, so are most people who are adopted. They just neglect to tell you, because it doesn’t mean anything to them”.

Tammy: I feel that it's like. I just feel it's normal, or like what, you with family and it's like nothing.

Joi: So, yes everybody knew around us, that's how we even grew up with some friends that were also adopted and we're still in touch with them, uhm, because they would also say: Oh, no, I'm also adopted and you like, oh, okay. So, it was even more normal because we grew up with friends who were.

Another manner in which adoptees were able to relate their experiences to others was through having friendships with non-adoptees, which normalised their own family experiences as typical in society.

Cherith: How did you come to reach that understanding?

Joi: Well, because I had lots of friends. I grew up in a generation where sleepovers was something that happened every weekend [laughing]. And I got exposed to how my friend’s parents were, how they were treated, uhm, I had lots of friends. Uhm, sometimes I think that maybe, uhm, I was more privileged than some of my friends... so I never for once felt like there was anything abnormal. It felt more like there was an additional privilege.

All seven participants associated adoption with the word normal. Moreover, according to research previously reported (see literature review), Hawkins et al. (2007) state that adopted children believe they are no different from their peers. My research findings thereby confirm the findings of this aforementioned study regarding adoptees' feelings or experiences of being normal, even though they are adopted.

5.2.6 Interracial and cross-cultural adoptions are positive

Seven (58%) of the participants also discussed their views on interracial and cross-cultural adoptions. They all had positive views of these types of adoption. Interracial and cross-cultural adoptions are considered by the participants as pathways to influence racial and cultural perspectives or divides in South Africa. However, it is believed that precautions need to be taken to ensure success. Specifically, the adoptive parents and adoptees need to be educated about the child's biological heritage. A participant mentioned that, apart from being educated on the race and culture of their adopted child, adoptive parents should also be aware of another important factor, the indigenous language of the child. The parents need to use various resources to ensure that the adopted child is exposed to, or instructed in, the language of his/her biological family. Only one participant in this study was adopted interracially, and the twins who participated in this study considered culture relevant, as they were abandoned and are unaware of their clan culture within the black community.

Joi: What I see, when I see that sort of situation, I see, uhm, an emotional roller-coaster unfolding for the child [laughing]. Which comes with any adoption. Definitely an emotional roller-coaster, but I think a, a great uhm, starting point where colour doesn't matter. Whereas the generation we grew up in, where I grew up in, colour mattered. Here these kids are getting an opportunity where colour does not matter.

Lance: Because now the parents who are gonna adopt a child is already coming with the mind-set of getting a baby, loving a baby. They not going to see colour anymore, until colour is gonna be shown to them through racial discrimination. But they still gonna continue to love their child, hence they going to teach the child no colour, you understand. The child's gonna ask questions like why does he look like that and why do they look like that. But once, also, like I said earlier on, if you honest with the child from day one, the child will not ask questions after that. I, I think interracial adoption would be awesome.

Namane: Yes, first of all Zulus don't do circumcision. So, if you adopt a Xhosa, obviously, he's going to go to the mountain you know, so that's, that's the reason I am saying, get to know the culture first and then when things like questions, you know, like they will start asking you, "Am I a man?" at school he'll be treated differently, you know, yes, things like that. Do some research before adopting, ...

According to this subtheme, it is essential that cross-culturally or interracial adopted children are educated in the traditions and language of their biological families, which allows them the option of being accepted within their indigenous community.

5.2.7 Adoption provides opportunities in life

This theme represents the opportunities the participants believe are associated with adoption. It was highlighted by half of the participants (n = 6; 50%), as they stated that opportunities were a part of adoption. Various types of opportunities were mentioned, such as growing up in a home and receiving a good education, which the participants believed they were afforded by being adopted.

Luda: Yes, no definitely. Uhm, I think also it's a chance of uhm. Well so it's basically completing the house and also giving opportunities to children that might not have it.

When one participant was asked to specify what adoption-related opportunities entailed, she was able to mention all the aspects discussed individually by the other participants. Therefore, the types of opportunities mentioned in the next interview sums up the other participants' opinions.

Cherith: What would you then consider, when looking at the whole picture, would be the positives of adoption?

Joi: Opportunity, definitely opportunity in life...

Cherith: So, opportunity, what kind of opportunities?

Joi: Uhm, in my situation, the opportunity to have a normal life, to be able to interact as a normal kid, go to school, uhm, go to university. Uhm, just having the support like any other normal child would have, as opposed to not being adopted and being placed in an orphanage where opportunities are a lot less. Uhm, so being adopted really

gave me the opportunity to grow up in a normal environment. Uhm and that's allowing me to be emotionally stable I think at this stage.

The participants believed that adoption allowed them opportunities in life that they might not have had and reflected gratitude regarding the opportunities they received from being adopted.

5.2.8 No guarantees in life

According to the participants, life is unpredictable and therefore they do not expect adoption to have the guarantee of a perfect family life. Half of the participants (n = 6; 50%) highlighted that there were no guarantees in any family's life, and therefore neither in adoption. The participants believed that adoptive families can only do their best, as with any family.

Joelie: And even in biological families there's mothers and daughters and father and sons that don't get along in a biological family and that child wishes he was adopted into a different family. And a lot of my friends felt that way. I wish I wasn't in this family, this family does not, I don't fit in with this family.

Lance: Look you get all kinds of elements. So, you start off as a young couple and you can't have kids and unfortunately, then, then fortunately you adopt a child, but then I end up having a drinking problem, or I become very, uhm, start having affairs, then I start pushing the child away, but that can happen in any family. You understand, so, that's just the realities of family life.

The participants have a diversity of life experiences, such as experiencing the divorce of their adoptive parents, the death of their adoptive parent/s and being abused within their adoptive family. However, half of them stated that the manner in which they dealt with challenges in life did not involve placing blame on being adopted. This could reflect that these participants placed a greater emphasis on their individual capacity to cope with life challenges.

5.2.9 Conclusion of the first meta-theme

Overall, adoption was discussed positively by the participants. The majority of the participants considered adoption a gift and preferred it to other alternative childcare practices. Moreover, the participants believed that being adopted was normal and provided opportunities in life for adoptable children. All seven of the participants who discussed interracial and cross-cultural adoption were positive about these types of adoption and it was recommended that the adoptive

parents should be educated about the culture and race of their adopted child. According to the analysed data, this meta-theme, namely optimistic adoption views, beliefs and values, is a reflection of the participants' own adoption experiences and broader perspectives on adoption. The relevance of this meta-theme to Psychosocial Theory is that the insights they shared regarding their own beliefs and values are visible. According to Erikson (1980), this is only possible if the development of their identity is not necessarily complete, but stable.

However, the importance of the adoptive family was acknowledged and will be elaborated on further in the next meta-theme. The following meta-theme to be discussed is relevant to Family Systems Theory (Bowen, 1976) and takes into account the participants' perspectives on the role of the adoptive family in adoption.

5.3 The integral role of the adoptive family in adoption

All the participants mentioned the role, function or value of the adoptive family within adoption. It was revealed that the adoptive family's functioning plays an important role in adoption outcomes. This led to the development of the second meta-theme – the adoptive family is an integral part of adoption. Interactions within the family are applicable to Family Systems Theory (Bowen, 1976), as it explains the role of the family in adoption (see theoretical framework in Chapter 3).

Cherith: *What do you think is necessary for an adopted person to grow up well?*

Tammy: *Uhm. Well, just to be loved and have that caring parents that they are with, so, the adoptive parents.*

The value of belonging to a family is expressed in the following statement.

Joi: *A family for me is something that uh, I think as an adopted child you can either feel that you don't belong and family doesn't mean anything, but in my situation family has just been the biggest support in my life and I can't see how I can, how people can live without their family.*

There were eight themes that were recognised within this second meta-theme. These themes are 1) disclosure of adoption status, 2) openness about their adoption, 3) sibling/s influence, 4) adoptive family support, 5) adoption secrecy, 6) adoption fear, 7) adoptive family compatibility,

and 8) adoption constitutes intentional parents. These themes are reported next [see sections 5.3.1 to 5.3.8] and followed by a conclusion on the results of this meta-theme.

5.3.1 Disclosure of adoption status

The majority of the participants (n = 11; 91%) expressed how important it is for the adoptive family to disclose their adoption status to their children. This adoption disclosure directly affects their adoption experiences and perspectives. Wydra et al. (2012) in the USA explored the experience of adoption disclosure with a sample of 18 adult adoptees. In the Wydra et al. (2012) study, adoptees who experienced problematic disclosure and struggled to communicate about their adoption within the family unit were not emotionally comfortable with being adopted. Similarly, in the current study, two of the adult adoptees who had experienced problematic disclosure of their adoption status and no opportunity to communicate about their adoption were struggling emotionally with being adopted.

***Joelie:** I think the child should find out, it's important because it makes a part of that child's history, it's a part of who that child is, it's basically your make-up that you wear. It's not something to be ashamed about, but I think that, it's something that a child should know, because you build your whole life, you grow up in an environment that you believe this is my life, you get use to this and you get use to your routine and you get use to how you grew up and then someone drops something on you by saying your parents aren't your biological parents. That means that put you back and literally let you think; has my life been a big lie, has anything in my life ever been true?*

One participant had not been told and accidentally found out about her adoption status, which was an emotionally difficult experience because she carried this secret of knowing about her adoption for three years. She had the following view to share:

***Natasha:** Umm, when I was, oh no they didn't tell me, they had to tell me, after my sixteenth birthday, because I had a breakdown, and I said, "I know" and all of this. I would've handle it very differently, I think you need to be honest with the adoptee, from a very young age. You know.*

It is important to note that four of the 12 participants four (33%) were not told of their adoption status and they discovered the information accidentally. Natasha's view about adoption

disclosure being necessary is the same as the other three participants', which was based on their personal experiences.

Feelings concerning the adoption disclosure theme are strong and clear regarding the necessity for disclosing their adoption status to the adoptee. Moreover, previous research has emphasised that early disclosure, or the method of disclosure of adoption status to the adopted child, is important (Wydra et al., 2012), and these two aspects were also mentioned by the participants in the current study. Considering that there are clear topics within this theme, it was possible to define four subthemes. The subthemes are 1) disclosure is appropriate before adolescence, 2) the disclosure approach, 3) adoptees disclosing adoption status to their biological children, and 4) risks of not disclosing. The subthemes are discussed below.

5.3.1.1 Disclosure is appropriate before adolescence

Eight participants (67%) discussed this subtheme. The participants believed they coped better with being adopted because their disclosure occurred at an early age. They also all believed that adoptees need to be informed of their adoption before adolescence.

Luda: *I actually think that, from as young as you are, so maybe about like four, five or whatever, because I don't think it should be; where, afterwards that it catches you as a surprise man. So, I think the earlier it is, it's better.*

Joelie: *Where a child, you can mould a child's mind, so you can tell the child. Cause I think my own experience, telling a three-year-old, this is what happened. A three-year-old would believe you. She wouldn't question your, she wouldn't question you. Uhm, the first seven years of a child's life is where you, where the building bricks for a child's life is laid.*

Lance: *Other people tell their kids later on in life, or it comes out by accident and then there's turmoil within the family, because then you lied to me, you know. Then it's hurtful.*

According to the participants, telling a child allows the adoptee an opportunity to begin to understand and accept the reality of being adopted.

5.3.1.2 Disclosure approach

There were seven participants (58%) who discussed this subtheme. The participants explained that the approach taken by the adoptive parents when disclosing the adoption status to their adoptive child is important. Telling the story of how the adoptive family became a family (the entrance narrative) is significant. This entrance narrative is part of the adoptive family's approach to disclosure. This is further confirmed by research on adult adoptees' integration of their adoption into their identity (Kranstuber & Kellas, 2011). According to Kranstuber and Kellas (2011), the entrance narrative told by their adoptive family has a significant impact on how the adoptee perceives adoption in adulthood.

Adoptive parents can normalise the idea of being adopted by being sensitive when talking about the adoption, including offering reassurance that the adoptee will always belong within their adoptive family and providing an age-appropriate biological history. In addition, adoptive parents should abstain from speaking poorly of the biological parents. The adoptive parents should also refrain from forcing information onto the adoptee and should inform the adoptee that they can ask questions at any time. Therefore, they should provide information on request.

Luda: I think, to know that they were actually adopted. Uhm, to know that, uhm, there was a plan for them to be with the parents, even though uh, it didn't happen naturally. So just to, it, it shouldn't be too harsh, but it should be enough to make them understand that they were adopted. But it doesn't mean they don't belong, because they are actually where they needed to be. It's just that this is a different way of getting them there, and yes.

Zintle: So, uhm, I just think that the way that you tell your child that they were adopted is important. You don't need to tell them about all the gory details, but you do need to just give them kind of, like an opening, and then say you know when you're a little bit older, then I will explain some more to you because, for whatever reason they come up with. Uhm, cause I'm not going to tell a three-year-old that their mother was a prostitute. I mean they will be like "what is that?" and things like that. I would just say to them, "You know what, your mommy loved you very much, but she thought that this was the, the best option for you and that's why we found you wherever, wherever, wherever". Uhm, yes. So, it's not being dishonest, because I'm sure that every person who has a child has some love and connection to that child. Uhm, I, I don't know how it is humanly possible not to love someone whose been growing inside you for nine

months. So, uhm, yes, but the struggle obviously was there and the, she couldn't keep you, and that's why you with me, basically.

From discussion on this subtheme it is evident that the adoption disclosure approach needs to be planned strategically and handled with care.

5.3.1.3 Adoptees disclosing adoption status to their biological children

The five participants (41%) who discussed this subtheme were all parents. All these participants stated that they felt it was necessary for them to disclose their adoption status to their biological children, as they believed that their children deserved to know. The participants believed that being adopted affects their child's lineage and access to a biological family medical history. They also want to normalise adoption in their children and they do not want other people to inform their children that their parents are adoptees.

Cherith: *Can I ask, why do you think that it's important that you teach your sons about adoption?*

Lance: *Why? Because it's not a bad thing, you see it's. I'm their father, they can see, I'm, uhm, well-groomed, well-respected, well, I got my manners and stuff like that, but that I didn't learn from anybody else, but my own parents, you know being a well-mannered child. Uhm, it's important, also for them to know, because there is gonna be a kink in their family tree, because that's the kink. Their family tree is basically just starting with me now.*

Natasha: *No, I wouldn't want her to find out, like I found out. That is why I wanted. She is still very young I think, to have that conversation with her, but I didn't want her to hear it one day, like I did. Cause I think that was traumatising.*

Cherith: *Okay, and you think that's important for your family life?*

Joi: *Yes, I think it's, I don't think that it's anything to be ashamed of. I think it's something that should be seen as normal in society, mixed families. Yes, and also if they want to, at some point, when they feel they want to have kids, or if they want to adopt kids, that there's nothing wrong with it, they can choose, they can make their own choices.*

The participants believed it was necessary to disclose their own adoption status to their biological children to educate them and because it is a part of their family history.

5.3.1.4 Risks of not disclosing

There were four participants (33%) who discussed this subtheme. When adoptive parents do not disclose their adoption status to the adopted child, it is a breach of trust. If the adoptee accidentally finds out about the adoption, it can negatively affect the family's functioning (e.g. cause a disconnect) and the adoptee's psychological functioning (e.g. cause depression). Disclosure assists adoptees in accepting being adopted and improves their psychological understanding when dealing with their adoption status. It is also believed that it is worse to find out from other people about being adopted.

***Zintle:** Uhm, and not telling your child is just, I don't agree with that at all, uhm, because one day they will ask you questions and if the answers don't add up, you might get a person who can be really resentful, uhm, so, ja.*

***Lance:** Yes, it's just because education is everything, so if your child is educated in the matter, I think you shouldn't have problems, because if your child is going to find out some other way or from their aunty or uncle by mistake and the aunty just had a bit too much to drink and you had a bit of an argument. That's gonna mess your family up and your mind and put you in, it can push you into a depression. So, if it's done from the right people, you can't go wrong. I don't think so.*

Irrespective of the adoptive parents' reasoning or beliefs about not disclosing to their child about his/her adoption, it is clear that, according to the adoptees in this study, disclosure of adoption status must be carried out by the adoptive parents.

This theme of disclosure reveals that the disclosure of adoption is an important responsibility and must be fulfilled by the adoptive parents to prevent emotional difficulties in the adoptees throughout their lifespan. Disclosure allows adoptees the opportunity to understand and learn to accept their adoption status. The adoptive parents also need to ensure that adoption disclosure occurs at a young age and in a sensitive manner. The participants themselves also preferred to disclose their adoption status to their biological children, because they believe it also impacts the lives of their children.

The second theme of this meta-theme is reported and discussed in the next section.

5.3.2 Openness about their adoption

This theme was derived from the openness the participants experienced in being allowed to talk about and ask questions regarding their adoption. This is key in the adoptive family's communication style around adoption, and three quarters of the participants (n = 9; 75%) highlighted the importance of communicative openness about adoption. These participants believed that adoption openness should occur at all times within the adoptive family.

Sadie: I think it's important for adoptive families to be open and discuss things.

Tammy: Yes, you need to. You need to be open. You can't keep it away from the child.

Natasha: My parents are very, uhm. I still don't know why they are like that, because they still don't want to speak about it. I don't know if it makes them feel insecure or if they think it's gonna hurt me, but my perspective is just that I think it should be dealt with more openly and honestly.

Zintle: Yes, very open and it doesn't matter if their, their mother or father were drug addicts or in prison or anything, as long as they know where they come from. Maybe they would like to better themselves and not fall into that pattern. Maybe they think that there's no problem with that, but it's their decision. Just because you took me into your home and loved me from day one, does not mean you get to decide things for me, because I am my own person.

Namane: Mmm, the communication must always be there, because if you are adopting someone you have to be in his or her shoes and understand how she or he may be dealing with this – after telling them, after disclosing the information to them.

According to adopted children in the United Kingdom, the USA and Australia, the lack of biological family contact is difficult, but it can be managed with the consistent communication of adoption information by the adoptive parents (Michail, 2013). Furthermore, similar research findings based on the perspectives of children in the United Kingdom reveals that the adoptees had a positive view on adoption when they experienced increased opportunities for adoption openness (Hawkins et al., 2008). The adult adoptees in this research study completely agreed with the openness opinions of the adopted children stated in the previous research findings. Therefore, open communication about adoption is suggested as being a good practice within the adoptive family and a requirement for the adoptive parents.

5.3.3 Sibling/s influence

Three quarters of the participants (n = 9; 75%) discussed the influence of siblings in adoption, which they had experienced in an array of family environments, such as adoptive siblings, step-siblings, biological siblings – adopted within the same adoptive family – and siblings who are the biological children of the adoptive parents. Therefore, their opinions differ regarding the role of siblings in their lives. This theme also reflects how different the participants felt their views were from their siblings regarding openness, disclosure and acceptance of adoption status (Joelie), how they felt supported (Joi), feeling non-supported by siblings (Namane), and how similar they are to their siblings (Dartagnon). Generally, the participants appreciated the presence of any type of sibling, while those without siblings in the adoptive family did not feel that they lacked anything.

***Dartagnon:** So, this is one of my first long-term memories, so that was a happy moment. And then there's obviously you know, he's my brother and we're naughty and we scream at each other and we fight like cats and dogs, you know. But I would never, uhm, having my brother and my brother as an adult now and the support and love that I have, and our history, I, I am so grateful to have him. Uhm, if he'd been my biological brother, I don't know if it'd be any different. If he'd been my mom's biological child, but you know I wasn't, who knows? I, I, I obviously don't know, but I, I love him, I love him so much. He's my brother, I see him that way and I think my life would've been worse off not having him in it. Uhm, and, and where it's, where I think it is quite nice to know is I'm, I'm not the Little Black Sheep alone. I've got my brother, he's also an adoptee. So, I've got someone that's got, we've got something in common. We've got that experience in common. Uhm, and we've got my parents in common and our life in common and our upbringing and all of that in common. So, it, it, there's a, there's, I won't deny it and say listen here, you kind of useful you know, there is a support element to that. Yes. So yes, it's uhm, I'm very grateful for that, yes.*

Step-siblings may also provide another supportive relationship possibility:

Joi: It's amazing. Well, uhm, so my brother and I were adopted by the same family, but my adoptive father had passed away when I was thirteen and ... my mother had remarried. So, with that marriage came five additional siblings and uh, because they are much older than us, they very supportive. Uhm, my eldest of the, the step-siblings, my eldest sister, she is the one that actually really stood by me and helped me and encouraged me through the process of doing this search. Yes, so it's been amazing.

Another aspect was raised that adoptive siblings are also capable of differences in opinion when it comes to dealing with their adoption.

Joelie: So, I have taken the positive route, trying to educate people that I'm proud of the fact that I'm adopted. Where he is; don't talk about it, this has nothing to do with you and this is the family that I have known and I don't know any other family. So, it could go both ways and even in my family as well. Taking my brother's perspective and mine.

Furthermore, the twins had difficulty relating to each other as siblings regarding their adoption status, which indicates that having a genetic sibling within the same adoptive family is not a guarantee of support in adoption-related experiences.

Namane: Yes, she is dealing, she is dealing with this thing in her own way. I am dealing with it in my own way.

Namane: ... and I also feel it would have been different if I had a male you know, sibling, I believe, I believe. Because some of the things she doesn't understand, some of the things I do and uhm, she, you know like, she doesn't understand, she doesn't understand this. She wants this thing to be, you know, put behind her.

Laura: ... but if I am with Namane (pseudonym), I don't act as if I need this information. When I am with him, I just say, I don't even want to talk about that with him because he always says, he relies on saying, "Yes, that's why I'm not working, that's why blah ..."

Previous research by Miiller et al. (2002) relevant to this theme focused on searching adoptees' psychological functioning in adulthood. Their research findings suggest that a positive predictor of life satisfaction in adoption is the presence of siblings. However, one adoptee in this study believes that being the only child in an adoptive family may also be a positive predictor of life satisfaction, as revealed in the following quote:

Cherith: Okay. What do you think are the benefits of you being the only child, compared to other people who maybe had adopted siblings, or whatever, in the house?

Tammy: Maybe they don't get as spoilt as I do (giggling).

It is important that this particular sibling's perspective is shared, as it reveals that there may not be only one acceptable adoptive family structure that will improve adoption experiences. It also appears that it is generally the adoptees' individual perceptions of their family structure that influences their adoption perspectives.

5.3.4 Adoptive family support

Adoptive family support was mentioned as pivotal to adoption and was emphasised by the majority of the participants (n = 8; 66%). This theme was identified when participants mentioned the value of the adoption support they received from their adoptive parents. The effort that was placed into ensuring that the adoptee feels understood, supported and loved appears to have influenced their opinion of adoption.

Lance: The mother is always the strongest pillar, I think, in the family when it comes to adoption. But uhm, yes for me my dad is actually the bigger pillar, because I stayed with him. ... He, he mentioned it later on in my life, you know. He knows I'm adopted, I know I'm adopted, but he still loves me as, as if I was his blood. You know. So we were a very open family about it.

Joelie: And that's where my mother came in again and basically told me you have nothing to be ashamed about, absolutely nothing and told me about the positivity that surrounded our family when they found out that I was going to come into their lives.

Napoleon: Like my father, he died, but he took insurance out, you know what I mean. Although he wasn't there man, the house was there man. He was actually putting a roof over my head.

However, both of the twins suggested in the research interviews that older adoptive parents may struggle to relate to their adopted child during different life stages. This view could be used to educate and prepare prospective older adoptive parents about understanding and supporting the adoptee sufficiently, but not to prevent them from becoming adoptive parents.

Namane: And another thing is that they were so old. Like, I couldn't go to them, you know. To ask them a certain question, you know like, uhm, now I am starting to be a man and there are things that are going, like in my body, you know the communication was so bad. To the extent that you look for role models outside. I don't find them inside the house, in your home.

Adoptive parents also need to be aware of the difficult emotions experienced by adoptees, as it is significant to understand the emotional support necessary for the adoptee, as described in the quote below. Although the participants were not specific about the types of emotions they experienced, two of the participants shared this view.

Namane: Which, you know, the emotions involved, let's check that out guys, the emotions. An adopted, an adopted child, you don't know what he is going through, you know. It's, it's, so, hey. It's so painful.

Natasha: They don't talk about it. I just know I belong there and that's it. They don't realise all the other emotions that's attached to it.

Adoptive family support is important in adoption and includes answering the adoptee's adoption-related questions, which may be uncomfortable for the adoptive parents. The quality of the support provided by the adoptive parents assists adoptees in dealing with adoption-related difficulties and in accepting their adoption status.

5.3.5 Adoption secrecy

The theme of adoption secrecy is about individuals, including adoptees, who choose not to discuss adoption. It was evident from the analysis that adoption secrecy still exists, as it was picked up in interviews with five (41%) of the participants. It appears that the topic of adoption is just avoided or dismissed in conversations.

Natasha: I mean, my Mom still told my daughter last year, that I'm lying about it, because she doesn't wanna speak to her about it. She said, "Your Mommy's talking

nonsense man.” You know. She just brushes it off cause they really walk on eggs around me, but it’s, yes. But, I think it’s just they don’t want me to feel excluded, or not part of the family. They want me to consider myself that. But I think that’s why they’ve done it.

Joelie: *Where I think okay, cool, not everyone’s, like I don’t think everyone’s adopted, because I don’t know that. But when I talk to my friends they know that I’m the only one that is adopted, because it’s not something people will talk about. A lot of people, they are adopted, but they don’t want to say anything.*

Luda: *So, my younger brother, he wasn’t actually adopted, so it’s just my eldest sister ... So, and with him uh, yes, I’m not too sure whether he even knows that we’re adopted.*

Napoleon: *You see how it happened is, I wouldn’t have told her. I wouldn’t have told my wife.*

Adoption remains surrounded by a preference for secrecy. Although the reasons for adoption secrecy are not precisely clear, it is an approach to adoption practised within some adoptive families and society.

5.3.6 Adoption fear

This theme highlights the fears that adoptees think prospective adoptive parents may have, which might hinder their choice to adopt or influence the manner in which adoptive families manage adoption. It is the fear of disclosing to the child that (s)he is adopted and then losing the child’s affection for them after disclosure. Almost half of the participants (n = 5; 41%) recognised adoption fear as a barrier to adopting a child and said the fear remains after having adopted a child.

Joelie: *This child’s not going to love me. The child is going to know that. And I think that parents are much more, they scared. “How should I tell this child one day you’re not my baby?” A lot of parents are scared of, to coming to grips with telling their child one day. Is my child going to run away now? Cause they’ve already been through the pain of a surrogate, or they’ve already been through the pain of IVF before going through adoption. And telling your child one day. Is my child going to run away from me? And I think people are scared. That’s why people are scared and*

have a negative outlook for it. Is my child going to run away from me? I think a lot of mothers are scared of something happening like that.

Namane: *Look the first thing is uhm, I didn't bond with my biological mother, so there was no way, uhm I could have had feelings, like, oh how can I put it, uhm, that love. Because what my Mother (adoptive) was scared of, was scared of that we were going to go away, search for our parents. And then move in or communicate with them, you know, that's what, that's what I think. That's what she said to me, she said, "I'm scared because I think I'm going to lose you."*

Natasha: *You know my mom and my dad they should have been counselled that they shouldn't keep it away from me for that long. Or they should've. I mean, I'm 30 and they still cagey (don't talk) about it. You know. So maybe they should have dealt with it differently. They should've also been counselled and all of this. My dad says "You're my child and I do what I want with you and nobody can tell me". I think he is, especially he is insecure because he doesn't have any other kids of his own. So, I think he is afraid that I might not be as close to him ... I think that's the whole thing, but they should be, should have been educated man.*

Adoption fear can prevent people from adopting a child, maintaining open communication within the adoptive family, and cause adoptive parents to become unsupportive in the adoptive child's search for his/her biological relatives. However, sufficient adoption preparation and counselling may assist prospective and adoptive parents in dealing with their adoption-related fear.

5.3.7 Adoptive family compatibility

This theme, indicated by almost half of the participants ($n = 5$; 41%), is concerned with the risk of the adoptee's personality not being compatible with the adoptive family and that this may cause dysfunction within the family. Although some participants discussed the significance of incompatibility within the adoptive family, it was not a concern for all the participants.

Joelie: *So, I think adoption in a whole is a positive. Depends on where the child, how the child fits into the family, or on the family.*

Sadie: Uhm, and there is the issue, the potential that the children will not get along with the parents. That's a possibility in any family, but you know, it is and I think there's, uhm, character risk.

Natasha: I look at my brother and I look at my mommy and her sisters and brothers and I think, it doesn't necessarily mean where you come from to make you a certain type of person. Because they're different, you know.

Napoleon: Uhm, yes, my Mommy is someone that likes to, likes to read man and uhm, me, I'm same like that also. Uh, my Father was a very uh, he was there man. His nickname was smiley, he laughed often.... That is how Mr. Nav said, he said "lord, I don't know, but you got that same kind of ways in you". But we are not, no way, we are not biological.

There was a lack of consensus among the participants about the risks involved in adoption in as far as the adoptee being incompatible with the adoptive family. Therefore, in this study, the effect of incompatibility on the adoptive family is not reflected as an agreed concern in relation to adoption.

5.3.8 Adoption constitutes intentional parents

This theme reflects the view that people who adopt a child have the intention to be parents who share love and care for their children. According to a quarter of the participants (n = 3; 25%), adoption is a decision to become parents, which to them indicates a dedication to investing in family life.

Sadie: It's an active decision, whereas you can fall pregnant hella quickly by accident and then you like, oh well, I don't believe in abortion and so I'm going to keep the baby, because people don't think oh, but then I will give it up. Society will be like oh, but why would you give your baby away, you're married, you can look after it, you could whatever, or not. Yes, I think that's exactly it, it's a choice, it's a choice to have a family and it doesn't always work. Uhm, you know people adopt children and they get divorced, but still have a very happy life, but it's not a happy family. Nothings perfect and I think it's a choice to parent.

The participants in this study emphasised that adoption comprises intentional parents, as adoption involves a lot of consideration and planning. This theme resonates with the findings of a study by Daniluk and Hurtig-Mitchell (2003), who reported that the infertile couples in their study believed they have a greater capacity for parenthood than fertile couples.

5.3.9 Conclusion of the second meta-theme

It is evident that the adoptees believe it necessary for adoptive parents to be educated before adopting a child. Similarly, the participants overwhelmingly hold their adoptive parents in high regard for their parental capacities. Their opinion on the need for siblings in adoption is not congruent, which suggests that it depends on the adoptee's individual preferences and experiences. All the reported themes indicated that adoption means family and that the family environment is a determining factor in adoption. Although some people may consider adoption as a cause of dysfunction in a family, Family Systems Theory (Crosbie-Burnett & Klein, 2009) focuses on the process of family interactions and not on possible causes of dysfunction. This particular way of systemic thinking about family functioning assisted me in understanding the role of the family in adoption.

Once adoptees begin to experience life within their adoptive families, adoption may impact in different ways on their lives. The adoptees' experiences and views of the impact of adoption became the third meta-theme in this study, which is discussed in the next section.

5.4 The impact of adoption

Adoption, being a lived experience, has an impact on the lives of adoptees, and this developed into the third meta-theme of this study. The participants revealed various ways in which adoption impacts adoptees' lives and thereby the adoptees' development and thinking. All of the participants discussed the impact that adoption had on their lives, but their responses were not all similar. Most believed that adoption had a positive impact on them, while a few believed it had a negative impact on them. Adoption positively affected the way they valued marriage, family, themselves and others. However, adoption negatively impacted the way a few participants felt about themselves, e.g. feeling rejected and having low self-esteem. These adoption impacts are expressed in the following quotes;

Dartagnon: *Uhm so, yes, sort of all the aspects of my life, not to sound too broad, but yes, uhm. My, my marriage, I think it's affected my marriage. It's affected my openness*

to adopting a child. It's affected my, how to treat my biological child. ... So you know it, it certainly, it had a huge impact. ... Uhm, so yes! All aspects of my life I would think that gets affected, yes, but in a very positive way.

Natasha: *I cried for a couple of days and whatever. But not because of them, or how I found out. It's because it's confirmation that the person who gave birth to me didn't want me. I didn't know why at the time yet. Uhm, but that was why I cried. And you know, you feel rejected. That's what I felt.*

Lance: *When we got married my wife was twenty-one, I was twenty-two. Twenty-four when I had my son, my first son, but my, my thing was, I now, because I'm adopted I throw myself in my family.*

Zintle: *So, like my mom chose me and she loves me and I'm so grateful and so, like protected, because of that. Uhm, it still doesn't make the hurt any less, though. So, yes.*

According to the participants, adoption has an impact on adoptees in numerous ways. These pathways became the seven themes identified within this meta-theme. The seven themes are 1) the impact of adoption is dependent on circumstances, 2) adoption impact on identity, 3) adoptees considering adopting, 4) adoption impacts on and is impacted by extended family, 5) adoption triggers, 6) adoption impact on intimacy versus isolation, and 7) adoption impact on self-esteem. These themes are not complex and therefore have no subthemes. These themes are reported next [see sections 5.4.1 – 5.4.7] and followed by a conclusion on the results of this meta-theme.

5.4.1 The impact of adoption is dependent on circumstances

This aspect was picked up on when more than half of the participants (n = 7; 58%) discussed the various circumstances that may result in certain adoption outcomes, as experienced by them. Negative family circumstances such as abuse, the death of an adoptive parent, or lack of knowing the reasons for relinquishment had a negative impact on their adoption experiences. Similarly, positive adoptive family circumstances, such as support and care, have led to a positive impact on their adoption experiences.

Dartagnon: *Uhm, I think my morals and ethics, uhm, have probably been affected by that. More so by who my family are and, and, and, and what they, uhm, how they affect my moral, my, my growing up has affected my moral and my ethical compasses. Uhm*

and I always directly link that to the fact that I was, I am an adoptee, because if it wasn't for being an adoptee, so by inference and I know it's a jump, it's not a direct maybe impact, but I see it that way, you know. I see that, well I'd like to think I grew up as a gentleman, because my Mom raised me as a gentleman and my Dad raised me as a gentleman. And manners, and what's good, and what's right and what's wrong.

Napoleon: *Like I can go again back to me man, because when I think of it, uhm, for me this is kind a like a worst-case scenario that you can think of, man. Being adopted and then losing a parent, when he is young.*

Natasha: *Maybe if I know everything then it will be better. I will understand it better. Why she did it. I think that's my main reason. My main focus, or the reason why I felt rejected is because I don't know what the reason is. You know.*

Lance: *Uhm, so. You know, where I think your research would be most valued is if you find, you know, somebody who is going to open up to you in a way of, if they were abused psychically, sexually and you, I think you would get more negatives there, you know, so. Cause their outlook and their emotional scarring might just be deeper.*

The opinion of Lance was affirmed by the following participant's response.

Namane: *I think orphanage would have been better for us, or abortion for that matter. Because, sorry, I'm sorry to say this, but uhm, I, I still feel that that's what my mother should've done for us, because in the family we were abused. I would say we were abused, err, we were treated like we don't belong, we could feel, we were made sure that we feel the pain that, "You do not belong here".*

Three of the participants experienced divorce in their adoptive families, but they never causally linked it to adoption. One participant felt that the death of his adoptive parent complicated his adoption experience. Another participant mentioned that his abusive family circumstances greatly influenced his adoption experience and resulted in negative feelings about his adoption. He further believes that adoption is a good option if done within positive circumstances. Therefore, it appears that family circumstances and their personal outlook determine the impact of adoption, which together influence adoption perspectives.

5.4.2 Adoption impact on identity

In this theme, more than half of the participants ($n = 7$; 58%) discussed whether adoption was a part of their identity and whether contact with their biological family was necessary for the stabilisation of their identity. Three of the seven participants did not consider adoption as a part of their identity.

Sadie: I don't sit down and go "Hi my name is and I'm adopted". I will sit down and go "I am in events management or I live here, or I do this or my favourite colour is that. It's not within the first ten things that you say to somebody. ... You know, if I had to give you ten identifying factors of me as a person that would not be on the list. Probably would not be on the list if I gave them fifty identifying factors, because it's not a thing for me. It is not what occurs to me when I think of me as a person.

In contrast, it also was stated:

Namane: So, uh, another thing that I think, that when you adopt someone, you should keep any information for that person, so when you reach a certain age you can give that information to the adoptee, so that he or she can know where she comes from, because I think identity is very important. You should know where you come from.

According to the response of one participant, it seems that adoption identity is present in multiple levels of development, which suggests that adoption may have an impact on identity in different life phases, such as adolescence and adulthood.

Joelie: My perspective of it is that I don't actually have a perspective of it, because it's my way of life. I describe it as my way of life. It's what I have known, it's part of my identity. My perspective of it is that I'm all for it, because it's what I have known to be part of myself and I have accepted it as a part of myself.

Joelie: Especially when you go through your adolescence period. Try to find yourself and then you don't know who you are. Cause you don't know who you are because you're not allowed to know who you are, till you eighteen [Legal age to search for biological information or relative/s]. So, I think that's one of the say negatives about it that I have experienced.

In a previous adult adoptee study, adults who felt their family environment was positive, healthy and encouraging had a higher self-concept (Levy-Shiff, 2001). That research finding is relevant, because the participants in this study who reflected a stable identity development also defined their families in a positive manner. Moreover, according to Fall et al. (2012), adoptees are considered to have a unique identity known as an adoption identity. However, it appears that the participants in the current research study have different views, as some believe adoption is a part of who they are and others hardly consider adoption as an identifying part of themselves.

5.4.3 Adoptees considering adopting

Within this theme, half of the participants (n = 6; 50%) stated they were prepared to adopt a child or children themselves. This does not indicate that only half were willing to adopt, but merely that this is the number of participants who mentioned a willingness to adopt. The participants who reported their willingness to adopt believe it was their background in adoption that allowed them an openness to adopting a child or children.

Lance: I think, nah, I will adopt, because there is nothing wrong with adoption. ... I will, yeah, I mean I spoke about it with my wife. She also doesn't have a problem with it, you know, because I'm adopted.

Sadie: I mean I would happily adopt a baby. I wouldn't think twice about it; it would be fine.

Natasha: Maybe. I actually said to my fiancée when he told me, cause we want a boy. ... So, he said to me "So will you consider adopting?" and I said "no". And, but thinking about it afterwards, I might be a good candidate to adopt, because I would know how to handle it differently. You know. Or know the insecurities that the child would have ...

Ultimately, it appears that being adopted influenced the participants to being open and willing to adopt a child.

5.4.4 Adoption impacts and is impacted by the extended family

The extended family, when mentioned, was either mentioned regarding their lack of support or their complete support of the adoptive family. The participants clearly remembered their interactions with extended family members and their emotions experienced in those

interactions. Therefore, the extended family can impact the adoption experience, which possibly impacts adoption perspectives. Regarding this theme, half of the participants (n = 6; 50%) discussed the influence of the extended family's view of them (as adoptees) and adoption. A positive and supportive extended family resulted in positive emotions in the adoptees about being part of the family or being adopted, and vice versa. In some cases the adoptees felt ostracised by their extended family members. A suggestion noted was that the extended family should also be educated about adoption.

***Joelie:** But, then my mother had to sit me down and tell me that, “we found out a month before that there was a baby coming (participant’s adoption)”. They said (her adoptive parents), “the surprise and the love and the support from my family was so big and everyone was so excited for your arrival”.*

However, not all of the participants chose to discuss their extended family's reaction to the announcement of their adoption. Other participants elaborated on their personal experiences with their extended families.

***Luda:** So, for example, ... one kid got hurt and her cousin's actually with her in school and ..., like her friend was telling her, "Aren't you going to see your cousin because she got hurt?" And she goes, "No we don't have to worry about her, because you know, she's actually adopted, so she's not really family".*

***Namane:** we were treated like we don't belong, we could feel, we were made sure that we feel the pain that "You do not belong here".*

***Cherith:** Sorry, is that the extended family or?*

***Namane:** Extended family.*

The following quote highlights an important aspect of adoption, as the participant acknowledges that the extended family also needs to be informed about adoption at some level.

***Natasha:** My cousins did it after everyone found out. They would say; “She doesn’t even belong in this family”, but my mother and my dad don’t know about half of them, because I wouldn’t tell them. Because I know how they would get if I did tell them. It would be big trouble. I handled it with myself. ...*

***Cherith:** Your cousins?*

***Natasha:** Yes. Yes. Yes, they would be nasty and stuff like that.*

***Cherith:** To your face?*

***Natasha:** Yes. Yes, or behind my back in the other room and then I would hear, and more often like that than to my face. But. But uhm, it's also the result of I think the lack of communication with everyone. You know. They should have been sat down and said, listen this is, that is. I don't know if it was done in my absence, but never in my presence. And I think, mainly because they thought that they were protecting me, but they weren't. You know, in the long run they weren't.*

Groves (2012) believes that the extended family has a great impact on how adoptive parents experience or view adoption. The research findings by Groves (2012) are relevant to this study's interview responses. It was revealed in the current study that the extended family also had an effect on the adoptees, thereby can also impact the adoptees' adoption perspectives and experiences. Therefore, based on Groves (2012) and this current research results, the extended family may have a positive or a negative influence on the adoptive parents' and adoptees' perspectives on adoption.

5.4.5 Adoption triggers

Just less than half of the participants (n = 5; 41%) mentioned experiencing what I consider to be adoption triggers. This theme reflects that adoption involves triggers that cause adult adoptees to think about adoption. Triggers found in adoption were mentioned by the participants in the form of life experiences, e.g. Mother's Day, the media, reaching a specific age or experiencing a life stage such as motherhood.

***Natasha:** Some Mother's Days I still feel it. When I think about it, you know. And like I said, I just always wonder how it would've been if I'd been with my biological family. Does she ever think about me? Does she ever wonder? Stuff like that.*

***Tammy:** ... but then the age of eighteen, that was the time when you can like apply to meet you're re, uhm, your biological parents and that was just where I thought about it, and said no, but you should have a different view of it, because they have a reason why they did it, so.*

***Lance:** You watch a movie about adoption or, and then you, you just wonder off and you think like what, what actually, where do I come from, then it hit me. When Joi*

also contacted me, saying that you wanted to contact me, then I only started to think about it.

Namane: Uhm, I think she [Laura, his twin sister] is the only family that I have. So, when I see her I always think of, out of, between the two of us, who looks exactly like our Father, you know, our Mother. If I look at her, I am reminded, you know, of this.

Adoption triggers are generally not a negative reminder of adoption, but instead ignite a curiosity or thoughts about their adoption.

5.4.6 Adoption impact on intimacy versus isolation

This theme, although discussed by only a third of the participants (n = 4; 33%), is relevant, as only one participant revealed that adoption directly affects his ability to be in an intimate relationship. This indicates that adoption does not necessarily have a negative effect on adoptees' ability to have intimate relationships in adulthood. This is pivotal, as the majority of the participants reflected in their interviews and demographics a willingness or capacity for intimacy, which is expected from the general adult population in their sixth psychosocial stage of development, according to Erikson's (1980) Psychosocial Theory. Some participants believed that their relationships were positively affected by their adoption (e.g. being involved within their family life).

Sadie: I don't think that my being adopted influences my ability to have a good relationship or a bad relationship. I don't think that it's like oh you, well you had a breakdown of relationships when you were born, so you never going to be able to maintain a relationship. No, I can't maintain a relationship because I'm extremely fussy and quite hard work. You know, it's got nothing to do with the fact that I'm adopted and I do think people think that.

Namane: And uh, when you feel hurt, you can't keep even, you know, like a partner, because you don't feel that she would love you, the way you want to be loved, because you were never loved when you were born, when you came into this earth. Your Mother didn't love you enough, you know?

Lance: So, I, I think also from being adopted, that is something that people, that adopted children look forward to, family life, to having that, you know.

There was a recognised willingness for intimacy among the participants and an eagerness to have their own family. Only one participant struggled with feelings of unworthiness, which created a barrier to intimacy. It is important at this point to reflect on the difference in circumstances between the participants, as it adds context to their views on relationships. Namane stated that he was mistreated by his family and that his adoption status was not disclosed to him, whereas Sadie and Lance stated that they had a good family environment and were told of their adoption at a young age. These aspects may be significant in the differences in the participants' responses to intimate relationships. Therefore, adoption circumstances more than adoption status appears to impact intimacy.

5.4.7 Adoption impact on self-esteem

It is important to mention that only a minority, or one quarter of the participants ($n = 3$; 25%), shared the view that adoption has had a negative impact on their self-esteem. Therefore, this theme was derived from the participants' discussion on how or when adoption affected their self-esteem. Although only a small proportion of the participants discussed the impact of adoption on their self-esteem, it appeared necessary for research purposes to reveal the diversity of perspectives within adoption.

Joi: *As an adult, uhm, before I had my own kids, adoption had more emotional attachment to it. Brought along lines of why was I adopted? Uhm, was there something wrong? Uhm. Adoption was, it felt, at some point it felt like something that's done because my biological mother was maybe ashamed, or uhm, feelings of unworthiness.*

Namane: *So unfortunately for me, I had a clash with other uhm, clan names, you know like, they would come to me and tell me that, "You are adopted, so you don't know who you are". So, I didn't really fit into the community, because of that. So that makes one's self-esteem so low, not knowing who, where you come from, who your Dad is ...*

Laura: *Then you know who you are and then you know where you come from. You know just, you know your self-worth, what happened, really. At the end, you are not a present and you are, you were carried by someone.*

Self-esteem appears to be impacted the most by the lack of knowledge of their (adoptees') biological history, poor treatment by community members, and feelings of unworthiness because of being relinquished by their biological parent/s.

5.4.8 Conclusion of the third meta-theme

In this third meta-theme – the impact of adoption – it is evident that life circumstances have an influence on adoption outcomes. However, the types of circumstances vary, such as a supportive family environment and even the death of an adoptive parent. The participants' views also differed on the idea of adoption identity being part of their self-concept. Half of the participants stated their willingness to adopt, because they considered adoption as a normal experience. It is evident that the extended family can have a negative or positive impact on adoptees, and this is determined by the extended family's own perspectives on adoption. Moreover, adoption triggers were mentioned, but did not necessarily cause negative emotional reactions. Another finding is that adoption did not affect the majority of the participants' capacity to form intimate relationships. Self-esteem may also be impacted in adoption by a lack of biological information and feeling rejected by biological parent/s.

The individual and familial impact of adoption have been communicated in this meta-theme. In addition, the adoptees shared their perceptions of society's role in adoption. The discussion by the participants about adoption and society developed into the fourth meta-theme, namely perceptions of adoption in society, which is reported in the next section.

5.5 Perceptions of adoption in society

This fourth meta-theme was established when all of the participants communicated the significant role of society in adoption. This is inclusive of the participants' views of and interaction with society. According to Muslim religious law, parents caring for their biological children will have a positive influence on the fabric of society (Inhorn, 2006). According to the participants, adoption is a loving expression of humanity within society. Therefore, the manner in which we as human beings treat each other and show love by adopting may also be considered as a positive reflection of the fabric of society. Rulli (2014), who stated that the sanctity of life is upheld through adoption, affirms the participants' opinions, which are reflected in the following quotes.

***Sadie:** Whereas now I think of adoption as being embracing society and how we live and the people that are in our world and making sure that they are cared for and loved.*

***Lance:** You just being humane by giving someone else another life, a better life and loving them as a person and not a statistic.*

Zintle: I think that if you are willing and able to take in someone, that in itself is amazing; and then give them love and a home and not expect anything in return, except for to be loved, is just, it's incredible. And, uhm, especially when they not your biological child, uhm, so, or even a family member, this complete strange person that you bringing into your life and you are treating them as your own. I just think that's incredible.

However, according to the principle of societal regression formulated in Family Systems Theory (Bowen, 1976), it can be expected that, when society is exposed to challenges and intellect fails, people will respond emotionally to situations. These types of responses are reflected in this meta-theme, as the participants believed that society generally has a negative perception of adoption due to a lack of knowledge. Moreover, they were aware of or had experienced adoption stigma, which could be considered an emotional response in the absence of intellect. It is important to note that the majority of the participants reported positive adoptee and non-adoptee peer experiences. The participants believed that educating society by reporting adoption research findings and having open discussions about adoption (e.g. in schools) were viable methods to improve societal views of adoption. Consequently, to sufficiently present perceptions of adoption in society, this meta-theme consists of five themes without any subthemes. These five themes are 1) societal views of adoption, 2) adoption stigma, 3) educating society, 4) peer experiences, and 5) societal changes, and are reported next [see sections 5.5.1 – 5.5.5]. This is followed by a conclusion on the results of this meta-theme.

5.5.1 Societal views of adoption

The majority of the participants (n = 10; 83%) shared their perspectives on society's views of adoption. This theme reflects their beliefs about society's views of adoption from their personal interactions with others and how they believe society responds to adoptees. The participants believed that society generally has a negative view on adoption because people do not understand what adoption entails. Some people with whom the participants had engaged directly had stated that adoption is wrong and unnatural. Moreover, some people might not adopt because they are uncomfortable with the idea of adoption or afraid of being stigmatised by the rest of society for adopting a child. However, some people may change their views of adoption when they are placed in a situation where they begin to consider adoption, e.g. infertility.

Zintle: I just think that not everybody's open to adoption.

Joi: *What else is there, a negative I think it is, uhm in society it would be ignorance, people's ignorance, ... Uhm, their ignorance in saying that maybe they unwanted, feelings, the perception that society might have. So, that's definitely a negative ...*

Cherith: *You are saying ignorance, so is it because they are not educated like you are trying to do with your children, or is it because they don't just understand?*

Joi: *I think its emotional ignorance. I think people, they don't emotionally understand adoption and what goes into the process of adoption. So, their perspectives are skewed.*

Sadie: *I think people have a negative, a lot of people have a negative perspective of it, because they only hear the negative stories. ...*

Joelie: *I remember when I was fourteen someone told me "but this is, it's wrong!" "What's wrong? Mm, what's wrong? It's wrong that I'm adopted?" "Oh no, no, we love you, but the situation is wrong." "What's wrong about my situation?" "You should be with your real mother!" ... I think, I just, everyone's, their perspectives changes as soon as you consider adopting, adoption.*

Luda: *I think so, and uhm, and at the same token I also think there's people that won't adopt because of the whole, uh society's expectations. Like uh, this friend of mine ... she's always said like she wouldn't feel comfortable adopting. ... she's battling to have kids. But adoption isn't something that crosses her mind. Cause they'd rather spend their lives being unhappy than actually going and take a child, I don't know.*

There are people in society who struggle to understand adoption, which negatively impacts their views on adoption and their willingness to adopt. Moreover, some people tend to openly share their negative adoption views with adoptees, which can be upsetting for the adoptee.

5.5.2 Adoption stigma

Just more than half of the participants (n = 7; 58%) discussed their experiences related to adoption stigma. Adoption stigma is present, as there were incidents in which adoptees were judged and treated differently because of their adoption status. Therefore, the responses reported by the participants are derived from either their exposure to or knowledge of adoption stigma. According to the participants, adoptees are stigmatised by views that adoptees generally participate in criminal activities, experience mental health issues, and that an adopted child will never be the family's real child. Additionally, the participants' opinions given in

response to adoption stigma reflected that the adult adoptees feel hurt, angered and frustrated by adoption stigma. One participant said that adoption stigma negatively influences people's willingness to adopt.

Sadie: *So, what they assume is correct, that like yes, that's it yes, "All children that are adopted are drug addicts, thieves, criminals. That's what they are." I am, are you kidding me, that's the dumbest thing I've ever heard.... I think that they say, oh but you know, shame she is adopted, that's why she suffers from mental illness. You, like no, that's not why.*

Luda: *There are so many people I know out there that battle to have kids and will go for invitro and try all these fertility treatments. But, because of the stigma attached to adoption they won't consider adoption. Cause they never see the fact that, or they always see that those kids won't actually be their own. And in my mind, I think that's just really, like, short sightedness.*

Joelie: *It does hurt, because you are insulting my family. I feel like you insulting me. But, then I felt like I should educate, because I always, I fought against it, always fought against it.*

According to adopted children in the USA, the United Kingdom and Australia, there is a concern that they will be exposed to social stigma associated with adoption (Michail, 2013). The concern of exposure to adoption stigma reported by the children in the research conducted by Michail (2013) is confirmed by the adult participants in the current study. Most of the participants in the current study highlighted the occurrence and experience of adoption stigma. In South Africa, research findings by Groves (2012) suggest that society plays a large role in the adoption experiences of adoptive parents and, based on this current study's findings society, also plays a role in the adoption experiences of adoptees. It was revealed within this theme that societal stigma regarding adoption affects adoptees negatively.

5.5.3 Educating society

This theme is based on the participants' view that educating society through formal education in schools, open conversations and reporting adoption research might improve society's views on adoption. Educating society was highlighted by more than half of the participants ($n = 7$; 58%) as a necessary practice for adoption to be understood and accepted within society, and for the adoption rate to increase.

***Sadie:** And so, the social stigma on it is that I think projects like this, your research, I think is amazing. I think if more people could read your findings and learn about people, even though people are going to tell you that they are set in their feelings. I think it is something that people they formed opinions in their head that are wrong, because they don't know. ... So, I think that people are not educated, they don't know the success stories, so they, therefore, think it's a bad thing. And they see it as different and people don't like things that are different. If it's not what they know and understand, they nervous, they scared about it. I think that's the problem. Yes, I think it's a lack of education and I think the stigma would be less if they understood more.*

***Lance:** But, there needs to be more education about it man, maybe in schools also. You know, that there's nothing wrong. ... You know, so there's no education, we had guidance and stuff like that in school. There was nothing like that. It was always about sex ..., but I mean that can also be part of guidance, I think, you know. Uhm, if the new generation like us, they more educated, they can pay it forward by teaching their kids there is nothing wrong with adopting a child.*

***Joelie:** I have a very positive outlook and very optimistic about when adoption comes into a conversation, because I have first-hand experience about what it is. Then you can educate people in the sense that, that aren't educated and are ignorant about the fact that, about what their perception is about adoption.*

***Zintle:** Yes, definitely important to inform people, but not expect their, their viewpoints to change. But just so that they know and they can make their decisions based on like solid facts and stuff.*

Based on the participants' perspectives on this theme, it is evident that education is a tool that can be used to elevate the understanding of adoption and improve the perceptions of adopting and of adoptees in society.

5.5.4 Peer experiences

A minority of the participants (n = 3; 25%) discussed the influence of peer experiences in adoption. The experiences encountered were peers discovering the participants' adoption status, or an awareness created of the differences between them and their peers. These peer experiences had either a negative or positive impact on the adoptees' views about adoption or being adopted. The adoptees' views about and experience of adoption were impacted positively

when interacting with other adoptees or supportive non-adoptee friends. A negative impact occurred when the adoptees were made to feel different from their peers (e.g. through typical tasks like a family tree class project).

***Lance:** I knew about my adoption, but it never really affected my life as much, because I was too, too loved by my family. But uhm, I also had friends that I grew up with, like [two friends' names], we knew we were adopted, we use to brag about it, you know, so.*

Lance's experience is similar to findings in a research review by Michail (2013) on the opinions of adopted children, who stated that adoption could be isolating for the adoptee, and that this can be addressed by meeting other adoptees. Therefore, it indicates that interactions with other adoptees could be considered a positive buffer when dealing with adoption-related issues. Connecting with other adoptees can normalise the adoption experience, prevent feelings of isolation, and provide a support network for the adoptee.

***Tammy:** I feel quite comfortable with it. Like uhm, I think in grade 10 we had a topic, we had to choose a topic that we want to speak about or share with the class and that was my topic, about it. And I shared it with my classmates and I told them that I was adopted. And they were really emotional about it, because you wouldn't say that and the way I carried myself and how I was, so, yes. ... Like my close friends that was in my class, they were like very, like connected and they were supportive, and yes.*

The next quote reveals the tactful awareness that needs to be displayed in classrooms at schools when requesting family-related projects.

***Joelie:** I know, in primary school I had an experience with, we were talking about, we had to make a life line and my friends had all these pictures of their mothers when they were pregnant with them. I was nine and I knew at the time of course, I was adopted and that's when my entire class found out I'm adopted. Everyone was like you have to bring pictures of your mother when she was pregnant with you and a lot of kids have that experience that, where their mothers are well, this is where I was three months pregnant with you and I don't have that, I don't have that. There is a lot of positivity that was surrounded by their mother's pregnancy. Where. Then I went home and I was quite devastated about it. Even though I knew, but, I still was very devastated about it. ... And I think there is a, the negative things that, when it comes*

to experiences like that, especially with outsiders, when their stories are different from yours and especially when you're a child, you would see, you could see that as a negative, but what if I did know my mother. ... And then I told my mom, but this is how I feel. I don't have anything to talk about with my friends and at the time it was a big project. Everyone was talking about it, everyone, it was a very difficult project for me to do, especially when I was nine.

Peer experiences involve the manner in which the adoptees believe they are treated (e.g. understood or supported) by their peers, or situations in which they felt different from their peers (e.g. school family tree project). However, most of the participants felt accepted by their peers, and therefore peer experiences appear to be predominantly positive.

5.5.5 Societal changes

Although this theme was revealed by only two of the participants (16%), it remains relevant because societal changes can negatively or positively impact the adoption rate. The participants' opinions reflect that, from their perspectives, society has evolved regarding the value of marriage and family life. According to the participants, people today do not prioritise marriage and having children as their greatest life goals, which indicates that they will not be interested in adopting a child. However, there is also concern about the large number of HIV/AIDS-orphaned children, and therefore there is a possibility that society will be forced to respond to this pandemic by adopting orphaned children.

***Lance:** I think it's very hard nowadays, also seeing that uhm, the younger generation in their twenties are more trying to sort out their, their financial state of affairs before they even think of family. So, most people now, uh, when I think of my younger friends twenty-nine, thirty, they having, they first wanna buy a house. They might be dating or whatever, but they not married yet. Vice versa. I'm talking about males and females; they want to be sorted out before they even decide to get married. Yes. Then it's also they need to compromise, family life. Then they land up having families quite late. ... But I think people's mind-sets is completely different to, to opening their hearts and their families and having children. I think that is very old generation and the way we were brought up, to have children.*

Sadie: I do think that will eventually change, because in a country like South Africa it has to change. AIDS is taking out a whole generation of parents and these babies are left with no one.

Sadie's response shares the same concern indicated by Townsend and Dawes (2004) regarding their research on the AIDS pandemic leaving a large number of orphaned children in need of a family. The participants' opinions suggest that society is not stagnant, and therefore might become concerned about the number of orphans needing a family, or the trend away from family life might lead to even fewer adoptions taking place.

5.5.6 Conclusion of the fourth meta-theme

The participants believed that society has a great influence on adoption, but that people mostly hold a negative view on adoption. They also highlighted the presence of adoption stigma and therefore strongly believed that society needs to be educated. It appears that peer experiences were generally positive, but school activities should be monitored and be made sensitive to adoptees. Moreover, participants sharing a friendship with other adoptees and supportive non-adoptee friends led to positive views of adoption and adoption experiences. A few participants highlighted that societal changes can influence adoption either positively or negatively.

5.6 Summary of findings

In the first meta-theme – optimistic adoption views, beliefs and values – very strong views emerged. The majority of the participants ($n = 10$) believed that adoption is a gift of life because you are placed in a family within which you are loved. Most of the participants ($n = 9$) debated the value of adoption against institutional care, child abandonment and foster care. Seven participants mentioned that adoption was a better choice of care versus institutional care, child abandonment and foster care. One participant stated a preference for foster or kinship care, in order to maintain the relationship between the child and the birth parents. Another participant asserted a preference for abortion or institutionalisation, but only because of the abuse he experienced in the adoptive family home. Moreover, half of the participants consider adoption to provide a sense of belonging. A few participants ($n = 2$) mentioned that they had not experienced a sense of belonging because they inexplicably felt that they did not belong in the adoptive family, or were treated differently by certain family members.

More than half of the participants ($n = 7$) asserted that adoption was normal and that a normal life can be an outcome of adoption. In this study, general positivity was expressed by the participants ($n = 11$) about adoption, and this partly involved the fact that adoption creates opportunities for adopted children, such as access to a good education. Another significant perspective on adoption is that it does not have any guarantees, but some participants ($n = 6$) rationalised that a biological family also provides no guarantees of a positive family life. The views of the participants ($n = 7$) on interracial and cross-cultural adoptions were uniform. They all stated that these types of adoptions were positive. Their only requirement for interracial and cross-cultural adoptions was that adoptive parents should educate themselves regarding all aspects of the child's growth, including the child's biological heritage.

In the second meta-theme – the integral role of the adoptive family in adoption – it is evident that the family has a major influence in adoption. Almost all of the participants ($n = 11$) discussed adoption disclosure during the interviews. The participants determinedly explained that disclosing the adoption status to an adoptee is pivotal and an obligation of the adoptive parents. The participants believed that the adoptive parents' silence causes more family dysfunction and difficulty in family attachment than when parents disclose at an early age, as well as remain open to communication about the adoption. The participants ($n = 9$) had varying views on the necessity of siblings in an adoptive family, which indicates that their need for siblings was based purely on their personal preferences. Furthermore, most of the participants stated that support from the adoptive family and their awareness of possible adoption difficulties were essential in adoption. Participants also addressed their concerns about adoption secrecy ($n = 5$), the adoption fears of the adoptive parents ($n = 5$) and personality compatibility ($n = 5$) within the adoptive family. They asserted that adoption should not be filled with secrecy and fear, because adoption disclosure and open communication provide better outcomes in adoption. Differences in family traits also will not necessarily separate adoptees emotionally from their adoptive families. A few participants ($n = 3$) mentioned that some adoptive parents planned to be parents, and that this was indicative of their great capacity to care for their children's well-being.

The third meta-theme – adoption impact – is significant, as adoption has the ability to affect the adoptee in different ways. Some participants ($n = 7$) mentioned that adoption impacts the lives of the adoptees through circumstances. They believe that a good life or positive family circumstances create positive adoption experiences and perspectives, while bad childhood experiences may develop into a negative perspective on adoption. The impact of adoption was

also noticed in the participants' discussion of their self-esteem ($n = 3$) and identity ($n = 7$). Interestingly, the participants who mentioned experiencing greater challenges in their own identity development and self-esteem were exposed to difficult childhood experiences. According to some participants ($n = 6$), the views and approach of the extended family affected adoption experiences and therefore also played a significant role in adoption. Moreover, some adoptees ($n = 5$) experienced triggers that reminded them that they are adopted and that resulted in either positive or negative emotions within them (e.g. sadness or gratitude).

Furthermore, half of the participants ($n = 6$) emphasised that adoption positively influenced their willingness to adopt. A third of the participants ($n = 4$) directly highlighted the impact of adoption on intimacy, and most of them believed that adoption does not affect their capacity to experience intimate relationships. Only one participant mentioned struggling with personal relationships because of negative feelings about being relinquished as a child. A significant aspect of this research is that the demographics and the interviews show that the majority of the participants ($n = 11$) had positive relationships with their adoptive family, children, partner/spouse and friends.

The fourth meta-theme – perceptions of adoption in society – is relevant because adoption is affected by social influences, interferences and interventions. The majority of the participants ($n = 10$) believed that society has a negative view on adoption and this was revealed to them ($n = 7$) through their exposure to or knowledge of adoption stigma. However, according to the perspectives of a few participants ($n = 3$), their peer experiences were mostly positive after they had revealed their adoption status to their non-adopted peers. More than half of the participants ($n = 7$) indicated that educating society either by themselves, at school or through research would improve their perspectives on adoption. It is believed that growth in society's understanding of adoption will have a good impact on adoptees, adoptive families and adoption. Lastly, society is considered to evolve constantly and two participants believed that this factor could either increase or decrease adoption rates.

5.7 Chapter conclusion

When the adoptees were contacted to request their participation in this research study they were enthusiastic to share their views. The participants shared their perspectives on adoption with ease, which indicates that they were aware of their own adoption perspectives and related feelings. Moreover, the demographics indicate that this research study included a diverse group

of searching adult adoptees, and they discussed a tremendous amount of information surrounding adoption. This improves the possibility for this study to show depth in the adult adoptees' adoption perspectives, including the similarities and difference across the four meta-themes identified. Interestingly, I noticed very few differences in the perspectives expressed by the participants within each of the four meta-themes.

The theories of Psychosocial Development (Erikson, 1980) and Family Systems (Bowen, 1976) were utilised in this research study to conceptually understand the participants' perspectives, as influenced by their own development and family interactions within adoption. It appears that, regarding their psychosocial stage (intimacy versus isolation), and irrespective of race, gender or any other demographic, there were more similarities than differences in adoption perspectives within the meta-themes. The only distinct adoption variable that appeared to lead to a difference in the adoptees' perspectives on adoption, namely early or late disclosure, is also acknowledged in the adoption literature.

The reason for adoption is to create a secure family environment for vulnerable children that will nurture their development. A major finding of this study is that all the adoptees believed adoption to be a gift of life, opportunities or family, which appears to be congruent with what the adoption process is intended to achieve. Many of the current study's participants specifically mentioned the educational opportunities they received from their adoptive parents, which improved their possibility of success in future endeavours. Other findings from this research are the four factors that determine the outcome of adoption: 1) the adoptee as an individual, 2) the adoptive family's interaction and decision making, 3) the impact adoption may have on an adoptee based on external influences (e.g. extended family), 4) and society's response to adoption.

The majority of the participants believed they had experienced a normal family life. The adoptees recognised within the extended family or through social interactions that biological families also experience family challenges. Moreover, the adoptees believed that adoptees do not automatically develop into dysfunctional people, but that it rather is certain circumstances that may cause adoptees to react negatively to being adopted. The participants were able to acknowledge that there are possible difficulties in adoption, but they could also objectively compare life in an adoptive family to life in a biological family. Therefore, they could substantiate their beliefs that they were experiencing normal family life.

According to the participants, the parents who did not disclose their adoption status to them (as their adopted children) and who were less communicative about the adoption were fearful of losing their child's affection, or that the adoptees would feel as if they did not belong in the family. It appears that people who want to adopt a child need to be reassured by adoption workers or professionals that adoptees are capable of feeling a sense of belonging within the family, especially when the adoptive parents openly approach discussions of adoption. In adulthood, the majority of these adoptees showed immense gratitude towards their adoptive parents and considered their adoptive parents to have a greater capacity for parenthood than biological parents. Moreover, it is evident from the current research that subsystems external to the adoptive family system also have an impact on the lives of adoptees. The subsystems identified are society and the extended family. Therefore, it was suggested by the participants that society and the extended family need to be educated about adoption in order to improve their impact on the adoptees' experience of being adopted.

In conclusion, all the participants believed that adoption is a good option in the absence of biological parental or familial care, but only if adoption is handled appropriately. However, the positivity expressed about adoption, including the suggestions made by some participants to alleviate various adoption challenges, demonstrate the overall perspective that adoption is a very positive alternative – for the care of children, and as a type of family formation.

Chapter 6

Conclusion, Limitations and Recommendations

6.1 Introduction

In the previous chapter I reported, discussed and drew conclusions from the research results. Therefore, this final chapter entails a review of the complete research study and is divided into the following subsections: conclusion, research limitations and recommendations for future research.

6.2 Research limitations

It is difficult to obtain a non-probabilistic sample in adoption research because of limited access to adoptees and adoption records. The use of a non-probabilistic sample in this study diminishes the possibility of generalisations being made to the larger population of adoptees. Furthermore, the research was conducted with searching adoptees, which represents only fifty percent of the adoption population, and the participants were selected from a limited geographical area. However, a qualitative research approach promotes the discovery of subjective perspectives on lived experience, which was the aim of the current research.

It is essential to highlight that, being an adoptee myself, and one who personally meets this study's inclusion criteria for participation, I have to acknowledge my own frame of reference, which may have affected the objectivity of the results to an extent. Moreover, it was challenging for me to apply the theoretical framework to the research results in detail, because the adoptees' psychosocial development and family systems were not under direct evaluation. The theoretical framework was more of a conceptual framework to understand the relevance of adoption in psychosocial development and the role of the family system in adoption. Lastly, the research perspectives were extremely semantic and broad. The results therefore might lack depth, as it was difficult to capture the full range of perspectives on adoption.

6.3 Recommendations for future research

The adoption literature advises that adoption research with adoptees should entail a sample selected according to either searching or non-searching adoptees. Since all of the adoptees in the current research study were searching adoptees, there is still a gap in the adoption

perspectives of non-searching adult adoptees in the Western Cape province of South Africa. Secondly, the research conducted has added a broad perspective on adoption by adult adoptees. However, adult adoptee adoption research can grow tremendously by focusing on specific themes that have been uncovered in the current research, as these will add more depth to adoptees' perspectives.

The adoptees' perspectives on the adoption procedure are purposefully not reported in the research results. This is because procedures have changed since the time of the participants' adoption placements, which took place between 1976 and 1996. It would have been redundant to highlight the negative perspectives on procedure that is no longer applied. It would be feasible for future research to focus on the effectiveness of current adoption procedure and policy so as to inform adoption workers, prospective adoptive parents and society. Lastly, adoption research in South Africa is limited and studies including adult adoptees from other provinces in South Africa will enrich our understanding of this relevant and important construct.

6.4 Conclusion

Adoption research in South Africa is limited, specifically research including adult adoptees as participants. Therefore, the aim of this research was to study the phenomenon of adoption from the perspectives of adult adoptees. Moreover, this research qualitatively explored the adoption perspectives of searching adult adoptees who were living in the Western Cape province of South Africa. The primary motivation for this research was to give voice to adoptees, as they are the focus in the adoption process. A secondary motivation was to contribute to adoption research in the South African context, and possibly to provide a clearer context for future research. The study was guided by the following research question: What are adult adoptees' perspectives on adoption?

Once the research objectives had been determined, it was important to identify an appropriate theoretical framework, since various applied theories are used in adoption research. Therefore, Family Systems theory (Bowen, 1976) and Psychosocial Theory (Erikson, 1980) were selected, as both theories connect with the basic purpose of adoption, which is to provide optimal developmental possibilities for a child within a family environment. Basically, these two theories were integrated to divulge the unique adoption story to be understood within the broad perspective on family formation, but inclusively of validating the value of the individual's own development within adoption. Therefore, in an attempt to better understand the phenomenon

of adoption, the focus was shifted to the perspectives that adult adoptees, who became participants in this study, had developed from their lived experiences as adoptees.

Ethical approval to conduct the study was obtained from the Research Ethics Committee (Humanities) (see Appendix F) at Stellenbosch University, and a code of ethical conduct was adhered to during the research process. A qualitative research design was utilised to elicit the subjective opinions of the adoptees. Various measures were incorporated to attain trustworthiness from this research design. The qualitative method of semi-structured interviews was selected. All the interviews were conducted by me, and I also recorded and transcribed them. The ATLAS.ti 7 (2015) scientific software package was used to assist in organising the transcribed interviews, and thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006) was applied to search for patterns of meaning in the data, which resulted in meta-themes, themes and subthemes, as discussed in the results chapter.

The main contribution of this research is that it provides the adoption perspectives of South African adult adoptees, which a review of the South African literature showed is clearly lacking. Moreover, the adoption perspectives revealed in the current research study have shown corresponding results to research findings from outside of South Africa. Most previous findings from adoption research state that adoptees are a heterogeneous group of people. This aspect is also reflected in the current research, as the participants were diverse with regard to their racial categories, culture, family structures and socioeconomic environments. However, there were many similarities in their adoption perspectives. All the adoptees in the current study were in the same psychosocial stage of development. Therefore, the similarities in opinions could be considered significant because the participants shared the same psychosocial stage, even though their life experiences and backgrounds differed greatly.

The research results indicate that adoptees consider adoption as a gift in many ways, one that provides adoptees with the opportunity to develop into functional adults within a supportive family environment. Furthermore, the adoptees strongly asserted that adoption should include adoption disclosure. Therefore, preparation for adoption must involve a strong emphasis on the necessity of the adoptive parents to disclose the adoption status to their adoptive children. Another adoptee perspective emphasised is that adoptive parents should be prepared for open communication about the adoption, which is suggested to occur throughout the life span of the adoptee. According to the research findings, adoption disclosure, open communication and creating good adoption circumstances appear to be key pathways to diminishing negative

adoption-related outcomes, such as low life satisfaction and low self-esteem. Therefore, adoption is suggested to affect the lives of the adoptees mostly positively, but also can create negative life outcomes. Adoption is also considered to be impacted by the extended family and society, and this effect is dependent on the beliefs that they have of adoption and is demonstrated in their attitudes and behaviour towards adoptees.

Although kinship care is the preferred alternative care opportunity in South Africa (Gerrand & Nathane-Taulela, 2015), the option of open adoption may alleviate the impact of some adoption challenges. Some challenges highlighted by the participants were unknown reasons for relinquishment or abandonment, which affected their self-esteem, and a lack of biological or cultural information, which had an impact on their identity development. Open adoption is a process that allows the adoptive family and adoptee direct access to the biological family. This creates an opportunity for adoptees to obtain the information that they need. However, although the participants in the current study were not adopted within an open adoption framework, the perspectives they shared were mostly positive.

A very significant aspect of this study's findings is that all the adoptees who participated agreed that adoption should continue being practised in the absence of biological parental or familial care. Considering the aim of this study and its findings, it is evident that the research question has been answered adequately. In conclusion, the overall perspectives arising from this research study, shared by participants (adult adoptees) living in the Western Cape province of South Africa, have revealed that adoptees believe in the positive nature and outcomes of adoption.

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Appendices

Appendix A: Informational Letters



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INFORMATION LETTER FOR ADOPTEES

Adult Adoptees' perspective on adoption

Dear prospective participant

This letter is a friendly request for you to consider participating in a research study regarding adoption.

You are asked to participate in a research study conducted by **Cherith Langenhoven**, B Psychology and currently a master's research psychology student, from the Department of Psychology at Stellenbosch University. This study will result in the completion of a thesis, which forms part of a Master's degree in Psychology at the University of Stellenbosch. You were selected as a possible participant in this study on the basis of being adopted and because you comply with the required age criteria of between 20 and 40 years old.

1. PURPOSE OF THE STUDY

The purpose of this study is knowledge driven by answering the research question: "What are adult adoptees' perspectives on adoption?" The aim of the proposed research study is to affirm the life experiences and views of adoptees. This focus will be to explore adult adoptee adoption perspectives, specifically within the South African context.

2. PROCEDURES

If you volunteer to participate in this study, I would ask you to do the following things:

You will agree to participate in an interview with the researcher for approximately 30 minutes. The date, time and venue of the interview will be telephonically negotiated between you and me. You will sign a consent form giving me permission to conduct an interview and use the results for my research. You will also be given a biographical questionnaire to complete prior to the interview. You need to agree that the use of an audio recorder be allowed during the interview. The following question will be asked in the interview: "What are your perspectives on adoption?" The word "perspective" will be defined and if there is any difficulty in answering the question, then probing questions will be asked.

3. POTENTIAL RISKS AND DISCOMFORTS

There are no foreseeable risks but there is a minimal possibility that discussing a topic of such a personal nature may cause some emotional discomfort. Free counselling services are available, if necessary to work through any unresolved discomfort later. There are two adoption experienced social workers who will provide free counselling if necessary. They can be contacted directly by you for an appointment at any time-frame following the interview. The contact details of the counsellors will be provided at the research interview.

4. POTENTIAL BENEFITS TO PARTICIPANT AND/OR TO SOCIETY

Participation in this study may not have a direct benefit for the participant but possibly being given an opportunity to reflect on your adoption could provide you with insight into its influence on your life.

The greatest contribution of your participation will be educating society about adoption from a personal point of view.

5. PAYMENT FOR PARTICIPATION

There will be no remuneration for participation.

6. CONFIDENTIALITY

Any information that is obtained in connection with this study and that can be identified with you will remain confidential and will be disclosed only with your permission, or as required by law. Confidentiality will be maintained by means of using a pseudonym (a name different from your own name) to ensure anonymity, storing all the gathered information in a locked storage unit, and only the researcher and supervisor will have access to the information.

The audio recording will be stored in a safe unit and you have the right to review or edit the recording. Only the researcher and supervisor will have access to the recordings. After five years the recordings will be deleted and the biographical questionnaires will be destroyed.

When the data is reported in the findings of the thesis, or published, no recognizable or identifying information will ever be mentioned. Results will be reported according to the pseudonym assigned.

7. PARTICIPATION AND WITHDRAWAL

You can choose whether to be in this study or not. If you volunteer to be in this study, you may withdraw at any time without consequences of any kind. You may also refuse to answer any questions you don't want to answer and still remain in the study. The researcher may withdraw you from this research if circumstances arise which warrant doing so.

8. IDENTIFICATION OF RESEARCHER AND SUPERVISOR

If you have any questions or concerns about the research, please feel free to contact the researcher Cherith Langenhoven, by email at cherith.bebe@yahoo.com or telephone on 084 586 0805. Alternatively, you may contact the research supervisor Professor Greeff, by email at apg@sun.ac.za or telephone on 021 808 3464. You may also visit the Department of Psychology in Ryneveld Street, Stellenbosch.

9. RIGHTS OF RESEARCH PARTICIPANT

You may withdraw your consent at any time and discontinue participation without penalty. You are not waiving any legal claims, rights or remedies because of your participation in this research study. If you have questions regarding your rights as a research subject, contact Ms. Maléne Fouché [mfouche@sun.ac.za; 021 808 4622] at the Division for Research Development.

I hope this letter provides clarity regarding the purpose and need of this research study. Based on your initial decision to consider participation I will contact you telephonically to determine if you are still willing to voluntarily participate after reading through this information letter.

Thanking you in anticipation

Yours Sincerely

Miss. Cherith Langenhoven



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UNIVERSITEIT STELLENBOSCH INLIGTINGSBRIEF VIR AANGENOME PERSONE

Volwasse Aangenome persone se perspektief van aanneming

Geagte voornemende deelnemer

Hierdie brief is 'n vriendelike versoek aan u om jou deelname aan 'n navorsingstudie rakende aanneming te oorweeg.

U word gevra om deel te neem aan 'n navorsingstudie wat gedoen gaan word deur **Cherith Langenhoven** (B Sielkunde) en tans 'n Meestersgraad student (navorsingsielkunde) in die departement Sielkunde aan die Universiteit Stellenbosch. U is as moontlike deelnemer aan die studie gekies omdat u geïdentifiseer is as 'n aangenome persoon en tussen 20 en 40 jaar oud is.

1. DOEL VAN DIE STUDIE

Die hoofdoel van hierdie studie is om meer kennis oor aanneming te bekom en in die proses wil ek die volgende navorsingsvraag beantwoord: "Wat is volwasse aangenome persone se perspektiewe van aanneming?" Die studie se hoof-fokus is om volwasse aangenome persone se lewenservarings en sienings van aanneming te bekom en te ontleed. Hierdie fokus sal nuwe kennis skep oor aanneming van die perspektiewe van volwasse aangenome persone – spesifiek binne die Suid-Afrikaanse konteks.

2. PROSEDURES

Indien u inwillig om aan die studie deel te neem, sal die volgende van jou verwag word:

Dat jy sal instem om deel te neem aan 'n onderhoud van ongeveer 30 minute met die navorser. Die datum, tyd en plek van die onderhoud sal telefonies tussen my en jou uitgeklaar word. Jy sal 'n toestemmingsvorm moet teken wat my toelaat om die onderhoud te voer en die resultate vir my navorsing te gebruik. Jy sal ook 'n biografiese vraelys voor die onderhoud moet voltooi. Dan moet jy ook instem dat ek 'n klankopname van die onderhoud mag maak. Die volgende oop-einde vraag sal in die onderhoud aan jou gevra word: "Wat is jou perspektiewe van aanneming?" Die woord "perspektief" sal aan jou verduidelik word indien daar enige probleme met die beantwoording van die vraag is. Indien ek dalk meer inligting wil bekom oor iets wat jy net genoem het, kan ek verdere aanmoedigingsvrae aan jou stel.

3. MOONTLIKE RISIKO'S EN ONGEMAKLIKHEID

Daar is geen voorsienbare risiko's nie, maar daar is 'n skrale moontlikheid dat die bespreking van 'n onderwerp van so 'n persoonlike aard, emosionele ongemak kan veroorsaak. Gratis berading-dienste is beskikbaar, sou dit later nodig wees, indien daar enige onopgeloste ongemak is. Daar is twee maatskaplike werkers met ervaring in die veld van aanneming wat die berading sal verskaf, indien nodig. Jy kan hulle direk kontak vir 'n afspraak na afloop van die onderhoud. Die besonderhede van die beraders sal by die navorsing onderhoud beskikbaar gemaak word.

4. MOONTLIKE VOORDELE VIR DEELNEMER EN/OF VIR DIE SAMELEWING

Deelname aan hierdie studie hou miskien nie 'n direkte voordeel in vir jou as deelnemer nie, maar bied tog 'n geleentheid om te besin oor jou aanneming en die invloed daarvan op jou lewe.

Die grootste bydrae van jou deelname sal wees om die samelewing op te voed oor aanneming, gegrond in persoonlike ervarings.

5. VERGOEDING VIR DEELNAME

Daar sal geen vergoeding vir deelname wees nie.

6. VERTROUOLIKHEID

Enige inligting wat deur middel van hierdie navorsing verkry word en wat met jou in verband gebring kan word, sal vertroulik bly en slegs met jou toestemming bekend gemaak word, of soos deur die wet vereis. Vertroulikheid sal gehandhaaf word deur middel van die gebruik van 'n skuilnaam ('n naam verskillend van jou eie naam), die stoor van al die ingesamelde inligting in 'n geslote eenheid, en slegs die navorser en studieleier sal toegang daartoe hê.

Die klank opname sal in 'n veilige eenheid gestoor word en u het die reg om dit te hersien of om te wysig. Na vyf jaar sal die opnames uitgevee word en die biografiese vraelyste sal vernietig word.

Wanneer die data in die bevindinge van die tesis gerapporteer word, of gepubliseer word, sal geen herkenbare of identifiseerbare inligting genoem word nie. Resultate sal volgens skuilname gerapporteer word.

7. DEELNAME EN ONTTREKKING

Jy kan self besluit of jy aan die studie wil deelneem of nie. Indien jy inwillig om aan die studie deel te neem, kan jy te eniger tyd en sonder enige nagevolge jou daaraan onttrek. Jy kan ook weier om op bepaalde vrae te antwoord, maar steeds aan die studie deelneem. Ek kan jou aan die studie onttrek indien omstandighede dit noodsaaklik maak.

8. IDENTIFIKASIE VAN ONDERSOEKERS

Indien jy enige vrae of besorgdheid omtrent die navorsing het, staan dit jou vry om in verbinding te tree met my, Cherith Langenhoven, per epos by cherith_bebe@yahoo.com of per telefoon by 084 586 0805. Alternatiewelik kan jy kontak maak met die studieleier Professor Greeff, per e-pos by apg@sun.ac.za of telefonies by 021 808 3464 en ook die Departement Sielkunde in Ryneveldstraat, Stellenbosch.

9. REGTE VAN DEELNEMERS

Jy kan te eniger tyd jou inwilliging terugtrek en jou deelname beëindig, sonder enige nagevolge. Deur deel te neem aan die navorsing doen jy geensins afstand van enige wetlike regte, eise of regsmiddel nie. Indien jy vrae het oor jou regte as deelnemer aan navorsing, skakel met Me Maléne Fouché [mfouche@sun.ac.za; 021 808 4622] van die Afdeling Navorsingsontwikkeling.

Ek hoop dat hierdie brief duidelikheid verskaf oor die doel en behoefte van hierdie navorsing. Omdat jy tydelik ingestem het om deel te neem aan hierdie navorsing sal ek u telefonies kontak. Ons sal bespreek of jy nog belangstel om deel te neem nadat u deur die inligtingsbrief gelees het.

Baie dankie by voorbaat

Die uwe

Mej. Cherith Langenhoven

Appendix B: Consent Forms



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STELLENBOSCH UNIVERSITY CONSENT TO PARTICIPATE IN RESEARCH

Adult Adoptees' perspective on adoption

You are asked to participate in a research study conducted by **Cherith Langenhoven**, B Psychology and currently a master's research psychology student, from the Department of Psychology at Stellenbosch University. This study will result in the completion of a thesis, which forms part of a Master's degree in Psychology at the University of Stellenbosch. You were selected as a possible participant in this study on the basis of being adopted and because you comply with the required age criteria of between 20 and 40 years old.

1. PURPOSE OF THE STUDY

The purpose of this study is knowledge driven by answering the research question: "What are adult adoptees' perspectives on adoption?" The aim of the proposed research study is to affirm the life experiences and views of adoptees. This focus will be to explore adult adoptee adoption perspectives, specifically within the South African context.

2. PROCEDURES

If you volunteer to participate in this study, I would ask you to do the following things:

You will agree to participate in an interview with the researcher for approximately 30 minutes. The date, time and venue of the interview will be telephonically negotiated between you and me. You will sign a consent form giving me permission to conduct an interview and use the results for my research. You will also be given a biographical questionnaire to complete prior to the interview. You need to agree that the use of an audio recorder be allowed during the interview. The following question will be asked in the interview: "What are your perspectives on adoption?" The word "perspective" will be defined and if there is any difficulty in answering the question, then probing questions will be asked.

3. POTENTIAL RISKS AND DISCOMFORTS

There are no foreseeable risks but there is a minimal possibility that discussing a topic of such a personal nature may cause some emotional discomfort. Free counselling services are available, if necessary to work through any unresolved discomfort later. There are two adoption experienced social workers who will provide free counselling if necessary. They can be contacted directly by you for an appointment at any time-frame following the interview. Ms. Kelly Cloete may be contacted on 021 763 6235 or 071 153 3231. Alternatively Ms. Debbie Demas may be contacted on 021 763 6236 or 071 847 6994.

4. POTENTIAL BENEFITS TO PARTICIPANT AND/OR TO SOCIETY

Participation in this study may not have a direct benefit for the participant but possibly being given an opportunity to reflect on your adoption could provide you with insight into its influence on your life.

The greatest contribution of your participation will be educating society about adoption from a personal point of view.

5. PAYMENT FOR PARTICIPATION

There will be no remuneration for participation.

6. CONFIDENTIALITY

Any information that is obtained in connection with this study and that can be identified with you will remain confidential and will be disclosed only with your permission, or as required by law. Confidentiality will be maintained by means of using a pseudonym (a name different from your own name) to ensure anonymity, storing all the gathered information in a locked storage unit, and only the researcher and supervisor will have access to the information.

The audio recording will be stored in a safe unit and you have the right to review or edit the recording. Only the researcher and supervisor will have access to the recordings. After five years the recordings will be deleted and the biographical questionnaires will be destroyed.

When the data is reported in the findings of the thesis, or published, no recognizable or identifying information will ever be mentioned. Results will be reported according to the pseudonym assigned.

7. PARTICIPATION AND WITHDRAWAL

You can choose whether to be in this study or not. If you volunteer to be in this study, you may withdraw at any time without consequences of any kind. You may also refuse to answer any questions you don't want to answer and still remain in the study. The researcher may withdraw you from this research if circumstances arise which warrant doing so.

8. IDENTIFICATION OF RESEARCHER AND SUPERVISOR

If you have any questions or concerns about the research, please feel free to contact the researcher Cherith Langenhoven, by email at cherith_bebe@yahoo.com or telephone on 084 586 0805. Alternatively, you may contact the research supervisor Professor Greeff, by email at apg@sun.ac.za or telephone on 021 808 3464. You may also visit the Department of Psychology in Ryneveld Street, Stellenbosch.

9. RIGHTS OF RESEARCH PARTICIPANT

You may withdraw your consent at any time and discontinue participation without penalty. You are not waiving any legal claims, rights or remedies because of your participation in this research study. If you have questions regarding your rights as a research subject, contact Ms. Maléne Fouché [mfouché@sun.ac.za; 021 808 4622] at the Division for Research Development.

SIGNATURE OF RESEARCH PARTICIPANT

The information above was described to _____ [name of participant] by Cherith Langenhoven in English and I am in command of this language. I was given the opportunity to ask questions and these questions were answered to my satisfaction.

I hereby voluntarily consent to participate in this study. I have been given a copy of this form.

Name of Participant

Signature of Participant

Date

SIGNATURE OF RESEARCHER

I declare that I explained the information given in this document to _____
[name of participant]. He / She was encouraged and given sufficient time to ask me any questions.
This conversation was conducted in English and No translator was used.

Signature of Researcher

Date



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UNIVERSITEIT STELLENBOSCH INWILLIGING OM DEEL TE NEEM AAN NAVORSING

Volwasse Aangenome persone se perspektief van aanneming

U word gevra om deel te neem aan 'n navorsingstudie wat gedoen gaan word deur **Cherith Langenhoven** (B Sielkunde) en tans 'n Meestersgraad student (navorsingsielkunde) in die departement Sielkunde aan die Universiteit Stellenbosch. U is as moontlike deelnemer aan die studie gekies omdat u geïdentifiseer is as 'n aangenome persoon en tussen 20 en 40 jaar oud is.

1. DOEL VAN DIE STUDIE

Die hoofdoel van hierdie studie is om meer kennis oor aanneming te bekom en in die proses wil ek die volgende navorsingsvraag beantwoord: "Wat is volwasse aangenome persone se perspektiewe van aanneming?" Die studie se hoof-fokus is om volwasse aangenome persone se lewenservarings en sienings van aanneming te bekom en te ontleed. Hierdie fokus sal nuwe kennis skep oor aanneming van die perspektiewe van volwasse aangenome persone – spesifiek binne die Suid-Afrikaanse konteks.

2. PROSEDURES

Indien u inwillig om aan die studie deel te neem, sal die volgende van jou verwag word:

Dat jy sal instem om deel te neem aan 'n onderhoud van ongeveer 30 minute met die navorser. Die datum, tyd en plek van die onderhoud sal telefonies tussen my en jou uitgeklaar word. Jy sal 'n toestemmingsvorm moet teken wat my toelaat om die onderhoud te voer en die resultate vir my navorsing te gebruik. Jy sal ook 'n biografiese vraelys voor die onderhoud moet voltooi. Dan moet jy ook instem dat ek 'n klankopname van die onderhoud mag maak. Die volgende oop-einde vraag sal in die onderhoud aan jou gevra word: "Wat is jou perspektiewe van aanneming?" Die woord "perspektief" sal aan jou verduidelik word indien daar enige probleme met die beantwoording van die vraag is. Indien ek dalk meer inligting wil bekom oor iets wat jy net genoem het, kan ek verdere aanmoedigingsvrae aan jou stel.

3. MOONTLIKE RISIKO'S EN ONGEMAKLIKHEID

Daar is geen voorsienbare risiko's nie, maar daar is 'n skrale moontlikheid dat die bespreking van 'n onderwerp van so 'n persoonlike aard, emosionele ongemak kan veroorsaak. Gratis berading-dienste is beskikbaar, sou dit later nodig wees, indien daar enige onopgeloste ongemak is. Daar is twee maatskaplike werkers met ervaring in die veld van aanneming wat die berading sal verskaf, indien nodig. Jy kan hulle direk kontak vir 'n afspraak na afloop van die onderhoud. Mej. Kelly Cloete kan gekontak word by 021 763 6235 of 071 153 3231. Alternatiewelik kan Mej. Debbie Demas gekontak word by 021 763 6236 of 071 847 6994.

4. MOONTLIKE VOORDELE VIR DEELNEMER EN/OF VIR DIE SAMELEWING

Deelname aan hierdie studie hou miskien nie 'n direkte voordeel in vir jou as deelnemer nie, maar bied tog 'n geleentheid om te besin oor jou aanneming en die invloed daarvan op jou lewe.

Die grootste bydrae van jou deelname sal wees om die samelewing op te voed oor aanneming, gegrond in persoonlike ervarings.

5. VERGOEDING VIR DEELNAME

Daar sal geen vergoeding vir deelname wees nie.

6. VERTROUOLIKHEID

Enige inligting wat deur middel van hierdie navorsing verkry word en wat met jou in verband gebring kan word, sal vertroulik bly en slegs met jou toestemming bekend gemaak word, of soos deur die wet vereis. Vertroulikheid sal gehandhaaf word deur middel van die gebruik van 'n skuilnaam ('n naam verskillend van jou eie naam), die stoor van al die ingesamelde inligting in 'n geslote eenheid, en slegs die navorser en studieleier sal toegang daartoe hê.

Die klank opname sal in 'n veilige eenheid gestoor word en u het die reg om dit te hersien of om te wysig. Na vyf jaar sal die opnames uitgevee word en die biografiese vraelyste sal vernietig word.

Wanneer die data in die bevindinge van die tesis gerapporteer word, of gepubliseer word, sal geen herkenbare of identifiseerbare inligting genoem word nie. Resultate sal volgens skuilnaam gerapporteer word.

7. DEELNAME EN ONTTREKKING

Jy kan self besluit of jy aan die studie wil deelneem of nie. Indien jy inwillig om aan die studie deel te neem, kan jy te eniger tyd en sonder enige nagevolge jou daaraan onttrek. Jy kan ook weier om op bepaalde vrae te antwoord, maar steeds aan die studie deelneem. Ek kan jou aan die studie onttrek indien omstandighede dit noodsaaklik maak.

8. IDENTIFIKASIE VAN ONDERSOEKERS

Indien jy enige vrae of besorgdheid omtrent die navorsing het, staan dit jou vry om in verbinding te tree met my, Cherith Langenhoven, per epos by cherith_bebe@yahoo.com of per telefoon by 084 586 0805. Alternatiewelik kan jy kontak maak met die studieleier Professor Greeff, per e-pos by apg@sun.ac.za of telefonies by 021 808 3464 en ook die Departement Sielkunde in Ryneveldstraat, Stellenbosch.

9. REGTE VAN DEELNEMERS

Jy kan te eniger tyd jou inwilliging terugtrek en jou deelname beëindig, sonder enige nagevolge. Deur deel te neem aan die navorsing doen jy geensins afstand van enige wetlike regte, eise of regsmiddel nie. Indien jy vrae het oor jou regte as deelnemer aan navorsing, skakel met Me Maléne Fouché [mfouché@sun.ac.za; 021 808 4622] van die Afdeling Navorsingsontwikkeling.

VERKLARING DEUR DEELNEMER

Die bostaande inligting is aan my, _____[naam van deelnemer], gegee en verduidelik deur Cherith Langenhoven in Afrikaans en ek is dié taal magtig. Ek is die geleentheid gebied om vrae te stel en my vrae is tot my bevrediging beantwoord.

Hiermee stem ek vrywillig in om deel te neem aan hierdie studie. 'n Afskrif van hierdie vorm is aan my gegee.

Naam van deelnemer

Handtekening van deelnemer

Datum

VERKLARING DEUR NAVORSER

Ek verklaar dat ek die inligting in hierdie dokument vervat verduidelik het aan _____ [naam van die deelnemer]. Hy / Sy is aangemoedig en oorgenoeg tyd gegee om vrae aan my te stel. Die gesprek is in Afrikaans gevoer en geen vertaler is gebruik nie.

Handtekening van Navorser

Datum

Appendix C: Biographical Questionnaire

Biographical Questionnaire

Name of Participant: _____ (Pseudonym)

Instructions: Where applicable please circle the appropriate answer

<u>SECTION A:</u> Demographic information	
Gender: Male / Female	Age:
Marital status: Single / Married / Living with a partner	
Race: (Strictly used for research understanding)	Highest education level: (e.g. Grade 8, college, university)
Currently employed: YES / NO	If Yes, what is your current employment / occupation:
Do you have any children: YES / NO	If Yes, how many children do you have:
<u>SECTION B:</u> ADOPTION RELEVANT INFORMATION	
Age of placement with adoptive family:	If applicable, Do you have any adopted children of your own: YES / NO
Whom did you search for: Mother / Father / Other relative	
At what age did you start searching for a biological relative/s:	Did you make contact: YES / NO
Whom did you meet: Biological Mother / Father / Other	If Yes, was it through Cape Town Child Welfare: YES / NO

Appendix D: Interview Schedule

Interview Schedule (Semi-structured)

Qualitative Question

The open-ended question that will be asked by me during the semi-structured interview is an adjustment of the research question of this study.

- What are your perspectives on adoption?
- Wat is jou perspektiewe van aanneming?

A dictionary definition of the word perspective will be provided to the participants to create clarity regarding what information the researcher is attempting to obtain, without leading the participants in any direction.

The word perspective is defined as “A particular way of thinking about something, especially when influenced by personal experience or circumstances” (Macmillan, 1996, p. 716). **Afrikaans:** ‘n Bepaalde manier van dink oor iets, veral wanneer beïnvloed deur persoonlike ervaring of omstandighede.

Followed by Probing questions that will be utilized:

- What else? / Wat nog?
- Any other views? / Enige ander sienings?
- Can you please elaborate on? /
Kan jy asseblief uitbrei oor...?
- Tell me more about your thoughts of adoption /
Vertel my meer oor jou denke oor aanneming
- What do you consider negative aspects of adoption? /
Wat beskou jy as negatiewe aspekte van aanneming?
- What do you consider positive aspects of adoption? /
Wat beskou jy as positiewe aspekte van aanneming
- What is your understanding of adoption? /
Wat is jou verstaan van aanneming?

Appendix E: Child Welfare Consent letter



Tel: +27 21 638 3127

Fax: +27 21 638 5277

E-mail: information@helpkids.org.za

Postal Address: P.O. Box 374, Gatesville, 7766, Cape Town, South Africa

Physical Address: Lower Klipfontein Road, Gatesville, Athlone, Cape Town

7/11/2014

Psychology Department

Wilcocks Building

Stellenbosch University

Attention: Cherith Langenhoven

Re: Request to conduct research at CTCWS: Adult adoptees perspective on being adopted

This serves to confirm that Cherith Langenhoven has requested permission to conduct the aforementioned research using a sample of 15 adoptees ranging between the ages of 25 to 40yrs old as selected from CTCWS adoption archives.

While the CE has agreed to Ms Langenhoven conducting the research at CTCWS the following challenges were discussed with Ms Langenhoven ie:

- The contact details of the adoptees have not been updated as we are not legally required to do so.
- Therefore the information on file would date back to between 25yrs to 40 yrs ago.
- The chances of all of the adoptees residing at the same address is therefore unlikely
- In all likelihood therefore this might require more than the 30 adoptees needing to be contacted.
- Ms Langenhoven has requested that 30 adoptees be selected in order to make allowances for adoptees dropping out or
- In accordance with confidentiality principles Ms Langenhoven would not be able to peruse these files herself.
- This would mean that our adoption secretary would have to contact 30 adoptees and if not more and ask them if they would be willing to participate in the said research.
- Should they agree the adoption secretary will provide them with Mrs Langenhoven's details and request that they contact her directly.
- Due to workload challenges and limited staff capacity it was also explained to Ms Langenhoven that CTCWS would NOT be able to provide the post research counselling sessions which ethically would be required.

Yours faithfully

N RAMKLASS

CHIEF EXECUTIVE

PP

WWW.HELPKIDS.ORG.ZA

Designated Child Protection Organisation in terms of Section 107 of the Children's Act 38 of 2005 of The Republic of South Africa
NPO No. 003 214 – Founded in 1908
Tax Exemption # 18/11/13/3954 / U.S. 501(c)3 # Fin 52-2109597

Member of



Lotus River/Ottery/ Philippi
AYC Office
Klip Road

Manenberg
c/o SHAWCO Building
Kasouga Road

Hanover Park
Sable House
37 Ryston Road

Khayelitsha
Bancedeni
D Sect Site C
T. 021 387 0163/5

Appendix F: Ethics Approval Letters



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Approved with Stipulations

New Application

02-Oct-2015

Langenhoven, Cherith CJ

Proposal #: SU-HSD-001350

Title: Adult Adoptees' Perspective of Adoption

Dear Ms Cherith Langenhoven,

Your **New Application** received on **03-Sep-2015**, was reviewed by the Research Ethics Committee: Human Research (Humanities) via Committee Review procedures on **23-Sep-2015**. Please note the following information about your approved research proposal: Proposal Approval Period: **23-Sep-2015 - 22-Sep-2016**

Present Committee Members:

Van Deventer, Karel KJ

Fouche, Magdalena MG

Hansen, Leonard LD

Theron, Carl CC

Viviers, Suzette S

Beukes, Winston WA

Graham, Clarissa CJ

Toi, Jerall J

Carolissen, Ronelle RL

Horn, Lynette LM

Nell, Theodore TA

Hall, Susan SLC

The following stipulations are relevant to the approval of your project and must be adhered to:

The researcher may proceed with the envisaged research provided that the following stipulations, relevant to the approval of your project are adhered to or addressed. Some of these stipulations may require your response. Where a response is required, you are encouraged to respond to the REC within six (6) months of the date of this letter. If a response is required, please respond to the points raised in a separate cover letter titled "Response to REC stipulations" AND if requested, HIGHLIGHT or use the TRACK CHANGES function to indicate corrections / amendments of ATTACHED DOCUMENTATION, to allow rapid scrutiny and appraisal.

1. PROTECTION OF CONFIDENTIALITY AND DATA

The researcher mentions in the proposal and application form that data will be stored on a secure device in locked storage. The researcher should clarify this in more detail with regards to what type of device this is and where the locked storage facility is.

2. TITLE OF THE PROJECT

The title of the project is broadly stated. It is the suggestion of the REC that the researcher limits the scope of the project to reflect that she will "explore the views of adoption by adult adoptees in the Western Cape Province".

Please provide a letter of response to all the points raised IN ADDITION to HIGHLIGHTING or using the TRACK CHANGES function to indicate ALL the corrections/amendments of ALL DOCUMENTS clearly in order to allow rapid scrutiny and appraisal. Please take note of the general Investigator Responsibilities attached to this letter. You may commence with your research after complying fully with these guidelines. Please remember to use your **proposal number (SU-HSD-001350)** on any documents or correspondence with the REC concerning your research proposal. Please note that the REC has the prerogative and authority to ask further questions, seek additional information, require further modifications, or monitor the conduct of your research and the consent process. Also note that a progress report should be submitted to the Committee before the approval period has expired if a continuation is required. The Committee will then consider the continuation of the project for a further year (if necessary). This committee abides by the ethical norms and principles for research, established by the Declaration of Helsinki and the Guidelines for Ethical Research: Principles Structures and Processes 2004 (Department of Health). Annually a number of projects may be selected randomly for an external audit. National Health Research Ethics Committee (NHREC) registration number REC-050411-032. We wish you the best as you conduct your research. If you have any questions or need further help, please contact the REC office at 218089183. **Included Documents:** DESC Report - Greeff, Abraham REC: Humanities New Application

Sincerely,

Clarissa Graham

REC Coordinator

Research Ethics Committee: Human Research (Humanities)



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Approved with Stipulations

Amendment

25-Apr-2016

Langenhoven, Cherith CJ

Proposal #: SU-HSD-001350

Title: Adult Adoptees' Perspective of Adoption

Dear Ms Cherith Langenhoven,

Your Amendment received on 05-Apr-2016, was reviewed and Approved with Stipulations.

Please note the following information about your approved research proposal:

Proposal Approval Period: 23-Sep-2015 - 22-Sep-2016

The researcher may proceed with the envisaged research provided that the following stipulations, relevant to the approval of your project are adhered to or addressed. Some of these stipulations may require your response. Where a response is required, you are encouraged to respond to the REC within six (6) months of the date of this letter.

If a response is required, please respond to the points raised in a separate cover letter titled "Response to REC stipulations" AND if requested, HIGHLIGHT or use the TRACK CHANGES function to indicate corrections / amendments of ATTACHED

DOCUMENTATION, to allow rapid scrutiny and appraisal.

Provision:

The request for project amendment to broaden the recruiting strategy has been approved with the following stipulation. The applicant is requested to ensure that, since not all possible participants are now contacted via Cape Town Child Welfare, that they must all be offered the opportunity to counselling (possibly by the CTCW services) if the need for it arises due to their participation.

Please take note of the general Investigator Responsibilities attached to this letter.

Please remember to use your proposal number (SU-HSD-001350) on any documents or correspondence with the REC concerning your research proposal.

Please note that the REC has the prerogative and authority to ask further questions, seek additional information, require further modifications, or monitor the conduct of your research and the consent process.

PROGRESS REPORT

Please note that a progress report should be submitted to the Research Ethics Committee: Humanities for the project as a whole before the project approval period has expired if a continuation of ethics approval is required. This applies to medium and high risk projects. The Committee will then consider the continuation of the project for a further year (if necessary).

This committee abides by the ethical norms and principles for research, established by the Declaration of Helsinki and the Guidelines for Ethical Research: Principles Structures and Processes 2015 (Department of Health). Annually a number of projects may be selected randomly for an external audit.

National Health Research Ethics Committee (NHREC) registration number REC-050411-032.

We wish you the best as you conduct your research.

If you have any questions or need further help, please contact the REC office at 218089183

Included Documents:

AMENDED_PROPOSAL~Request for amendment~

Sincerely,

Clarissa Graham

REC Coordinator

Research Ethics Committee: Human Research (Humanities)

Appendix G: Keywords and Abbreviations

Adoptees – A person who is adopted

Adoption – The act of adopting a child or the legal placement of a child with people who are not their birth parents

Adoption Disclosure – The act of revealing to the adoptive child that he/she is adopted and possibly providing background information

ART – Artificial reproductive technologies

Communicative openness – The open communication between family members regarding any topic

Entrance narratives – The story told to the adopted child regarding the manner in which they became part of the adoptive family

Kinship care – The care of children by relatives or adults who share a family like relationship to the child which occurs in the absence of the birth parents.

Pro-natalism – The practice of encouraging the bearing of children within a family.

Searching adoptees – Adoptees who search for biological relative/s or biological information